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Self-Monitoring Pronunciation Techniques for ESL/EFL Graduate Students

Carolyn Samuel

Summary:

Despite students' traditional skepticism, they *can* learn to self-monitor aspects of pronunciation. The presenter leads participants through activities that encourage independent practice and have proven successful with graduate students at two Canadian universities. Activities focus primarily on suprasegmental features of pronunciation as these have been deemed more significant than segmental features in developing intelligibility. Novices at teaching pronunciation who are interested in expanding their activities bank will be interested.

The workshop began with some background: The self-monitoring techniques have been used with graduate students at McGill University in 13-week (39 hours) credit courses and with graduate students at the University of Toronto in six-week (12 hours) non-credit university subsidized (free) courses. Students have come from a variety of first language backgrounds and are enrolled in academic disciplines across the university.

Workshop materials were divided into three parts: rhythm, word stress and intonation. Each section began with an awareness activity since students first need to recognize a target. This was followed by guided practice activities and then by independent practice activities. All activities were designed to be used with materials specific to students' respective fields of study since authenticity and relevance of the material are particularly important to graduate students who are so focused on their studies.

In the rhythm section, which focused on stress at the sentence level, techniques included tapping, nodding and using the ticking of a metronome. Some of the activities illustrated how

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From the Editor

In this issue, we bring you an eclectic mix of workshops and papers that evoked rave reviews at last year's conference. Workshops include strategies for ESL in the workplace, self-monitoring pronunciation techniques, journaling for a multi-level setting and self-access activities.

Papers presented at the conference covered a variety of research as well. The MindBody Connection explores the relationship between tk and tk and Grammar Correction in L2 Writing provides some insights into what corrections actually help ESL learners.

LOEP: A Computer-Adaptive Language Test uses technology to fine-tune what was formerly a paper process and Learning about Unit 731 shows how digital clips can be used as additional media in the classroom.

A mini-theme that has developed in this issue deals with concerns unique to Chinese ESL learners. In one, Team China Meets Team Canada, differing concepts of teamwork between these two cultures are outlined, while in another, Chinese students evaluate what communicative competence means to them. Finally, Why Can We Not Understand Aurally What We Comprehend Visually? compares Chinese speakers' well-honed skills in reading and writing in English with their less-developed listening and speaking skills.

Have a safe and relaxing summer. Brigid Kelso, Editor, Contact

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grammar practice could be integrated with rhythm practice. The word stress section included techniques such as using a mirror, particularly to practice the problematic "schwa" sound, and Gilbert's (1994) popular elastic band technique. The Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000) was used to demonstrate how to develop individual pronunciation logs to encourage retention of stress patterns. In addition, using the AWL has the collateral benefit of integrating vocabulary building while practicing pronunciation. Participants also were made aware of the value of making students aware of audio files in certain on-line dictionaries and of teaching students how to interpret the different stress markers in these dictionaries. The intonation section had participants humming sentences with hand on larynx to feel the rise and fall of their voices. These rises and falls were accompanied by hand movements that help students to physically sense the ups and downs of English intonation.

Comments from graduate students who have used the techniques were offered as evidence of students' favourable response to the material illustrated in the workshop. The techniques are considered a novel and stimulating way to improve pronunciation: they appeal to a variety of learning styles, e.g. kinesthetic, musical, auditory, visual; they encourage independence in learning as students do not need to rely on a native-speaker or a teacher as a sounding board; they are do-able in terms of linguistic production (in contrast to the frustration often associated with the lack of ability to produce a particular sound); they can be used when students are free of the demands on their time during an academic semester and have time to devote to practice; they afford a collateral benefit to students' listening ability.

Participants left the workshop with a handout of activities that incorporate the techniques, including an analysis activity that students can use on a regular basis to analyze their pronunciation of suprasegmentals and subsequently to self-monitor pronunciation improvement.

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LEVELS OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LOEP):

A COMPUTER-ADAPTIVE LANGUAGE TEST

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ABSTRACT

Levels of English Proficiency (LOEP) is a computer-adaptive language test developed by the Educational Testing Service for The College Board of New York, to be used for student placement in both two-year and four-year post-secondary institutions. This paper describes the *LOEP* test and points out a few considerations when using the test, with reference to how one post-secondary L2 program in Ontario has used it in the past.

INTRODUCTION

Finding a reliable and valid test which assesses L2 proficiency to the extent of accurately placing students in appropriate learning levels is a challenge which all institutions face. A great benefit of the technology boom in recent years is that many placement tests have been computerized, thus saving educational institutions many hours of time which could be spent more profitably elsewhere. *Levels of English Proficiency (LOEP)* is one such computer-adaptive language test (CALT), developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) for The College Board of New York, New York. It is one of eight components of The College Board's ACCUPLACER, a computer-software system designed for college-student placement.[1] *LOEP* was added to ACCUPLACER in 1993 as a low-threat English placement test for L2 and remedial L1 students, "regardless of their level of academic preparedness", seeking admission to a college with "open-door policies" (1997, *ACCUPLACER Program Overview: Coordinator's Guide*: 82).

This paper arises from work I did at a previous college to where I am now, two years ago. That college helped to pilot *LOEP* in the 1992-93 academic year (*LOEP* was officially introduced to ACCUPLACER a year later). It was part of a continuing computer project initiative in conjunction with ETS, the College Board, and the League for Innovation in the Community College.[2] The college has been using *LOEP* ever since to place its incoming students. As an instructor in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, I was not personally involved in student placement, but I certainly lived with the results of it! Furthermore, at the time I was there, the college had just restructured its program into eight instead of its former three levels, and when the change came about, *LOEP* played an even more crucial role in the placement of L2 students. It is for that reason

that I chose to examine the *LOEP* test in general, and to assess its usefulness for Canadian college-student placement in particular.

THE *LOEP* TEST

Test History and Development

In a1988 nation-wide survey, American ESL educators expressed the need for a computer-adaptive ESL test to aid in the more efficient placement of large numbers of students entering two-year colleges. Thus, ETS took on the task of developing a test that would be useful for both two-year and four-year post-secondary institutions (*Coordinator's Guide*: 11). The test development process was quite comprehensive, consisting of five phases which included:

1) forming the test specifications (purpose, skills, content, format);
2) writing the questions, using a variety of experts, and with internal and external reviews "to assure... [the questions met] ETS standards for currency, sensitivity, and bias-free language" (*Coordinator's Guide:* 9);
3) extensive pretesting;
4) preparing the final test (using those questions which passed the pre-testing phase, and reviewing the test as a whole);
5) analyzing post-administration data (of which tester and testee feedback was just one part).[3]

LOEP was completed and added to ACCUPLACER in 1993 as part of its DOS-version computer-adaptive test (CAT). Then, in 1998, ACCUPLACER went on-line, becoming a web-adaptive test (WAT) which was, according to its brochure claims at the time, "the first and only program of its kind to be delivered over the Internet".[4] The college I was working at chose to switch to the web-based version in 1999 because it was even easier to administer than before, and was less costly in terms of software installation and upgrading.

Format and Content

OEP is an untimed, fixed-length computer-adaptive test.[5] In its basic form, it consists of three subsections, each with 20 questions (multiple-choice and one word or short phrase fill-in-the-blank). The test takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.

1) *Reading Skills* assesses reading comprehension of short and medium-length passages (50 words or less, and 50-90 words) on a variety of subjects such as Arts, History, Psychology, and Science. It includes both basic comprehension questions (eg. paraphrasing, vocabulary, pronoun reference) as well as inferencing skills (eg. main idea, fact/opinion, point of view).
2) *Language Use* assesses a large number of grammar skills and usage, such as subject-verb agreement, verb tenses and forms, prepositions, fragments, and run-on sentences.

3) *Sentence Meaning* assesses word-meaning comprehension in one- or two- sentence contexts, on a variety of subjects. It tests such areas as phrasal verbs, idioms, adjectives and adverbs, connectives, and commands.[6]

The College Board web site shows that there are two additional, optional subsections to *LOEP*: Listening and WritePlacer ESL. Because the college I taught at did not use these last two subsections, I have chosen not to include them in my review.[7]

Uses

As are all of ACCUPLACER's computerized-placement tests (CPTs),[8] *LOEP* is designed to be used for low- or medium stakes purposes, for students who have already been accepted into a post-secondary institution. It cannot be compared to the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT),[9] a high-stakes test which assesses more general abilities and is used for college/university admissions as well as for the granting of scholarships.

ETS claims that *LOEP* can be suitably used for testing, re-testing and post-course testing purposes because the item numbers and sequences in a session are very large. Memorization of questions would be nearly impossible, and the computer-adaptive nature of the test means that no two tests are alike. A further use comes with the Proficiency Statements (written and reviewed by ESL specialists) provided by ACCUPLACER, which give specific information about what knowledge or skills students can be expected to have at certain points on the CPT scale. Using these statements, "the test content can be matched to course curriculum to assist in the development of placement scores and to foster alignment between test content and curricula. Proficiency statements also provide students with descriptions of their strengths and weaknesses so that they can work on improving these skills" (1994, *ACCUPLACER Proficiency Statements*: 2).

OBSERVATIONS

Finding a good set of guidelines to help a novice in the field assess a CPT like *LOEP* seems to be asking the impossible. J.D. Brown (1997) and Patricia Dunkel (1999) address many of the issues that test developers and test users need to consider with CBTs and CATs, but no one seems to have pulled all the information together. There is even less general information available on CPTs, other than some dated research supported by The College Board itself (which does not render it meaningless, of course!).[10]

I believe that *LOEP* is a good CAT (and WAT). With the full weight of ETS and The College Board behind it, an abundance of funding was provided for research, measurement, analysis, development and piloting purposes.[11] It appropriately defines its purpose and target population, and

the questions in the item pool--carefully written and pre-tested--appear to be fair and useful for assessment purposes. The test reliability for each of *LOEP's* subsections has a coefficient of .87 or higher (*Coordinator's Guide*: 18), which is very good for a low-stakes test.

Extensive guidelines for tester and testee usage accompany the test, along with a plethora of background information and technical information. As a "high-tech" web-based test,[12] most of the work is done by the server, and with six-day-a-week on-line support. ACCUPLACER even provides a separate dial-up number in case the college computer system is not working properly, in order to guarantee test delivery. The only real drawbacks are when the Internet is in heavy use, making download time somewhat slower (a minor inconvenience), or if the Internet itself is not working (which is rarely a problem). In this latter instance, unfortunately, students will not be able to take the test "on demand" but will have to wait. A pen-and-paper version is no longer available.

Unfortunately, I cannot properly address the effectiveness of *LOEP* as a stand-alone CPT because the college's L2 placement at the time I was reviewing the test included the student's *LOEP* score, a writing sample (marked by EAP faculty) and often an accompanying interview. It would be interesting to do further research on this, to see how often students were placed in a level that was contrary to *LOEP*'s recommendations, but this was not possible at the time. It would also be interesting to see if the two optional subsections to *LOEP* (Listening and WritePlacer ESL) could have provided the supplementary information about a student that the EAP faculty was looking for in the personal interviews.

Another area that would bear further research would be an examination of placement results when institutions re-set the cut scores, since programs that have more than the basic three levels outlined by *LOEP* will necessarily need to alter the cuts scores as well. This is clearly a key issue in CALT; Brown (1997) points to a multitude of literature on the issue of decision-making regarding cut scores (52). Re-setting the cut scores is not unusual or discouraged by ACCUPLACER; *The Coordinator's Guide* clearly states: "Since placement criteria for your institution are unique, it is not possible for the College Board to provide you with definitive rules to use in your interpretation of scores and placement of students" (31). What the *Guide* goes on to recommend is an ETS publication entitled **Passing Scores**, which describes several different ways of approaching the setting of cut scores, using the individual institution's existing placement practices as a starting point. It also suggests that these scores can be modified as the individual institution "gains experience with the CPTs" (32). While it is good that ETS has provided help in this matter, it shows that institutions choosing to change the cut scores no longer have a basic tool they can simply administer to

incoming students. Much time would be needed to look at, experiment with, follow-up and review the various suggestions ETS offers.

Another issue to address when using *LOEP* is the consideration to be given to construct-relevant variables such as computer-familiarity or computer-anxiety, and their impact on student performance in *LOEP*.[13] The college I was at was well aware of the importance of offering general orientation sessions and trying to ensure that students felt as comfortable as possible when placement testing was underway. Still, in my work as a Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) teacher, I have found there are still some students (though relatively few) who are computer-illiterate. I cannot help but wonder what effect this might have had on their computerized-placement performance. For this reason, a further written test and oral interview to supplement the LOEP test certainly makes sense.

CONCLUSION

A tool is only as good as the person who uses it. How do ETS and The College Board ensure that *LOEP* is being used the way it was designed to be used? Is that even one of their functions? *LOEP*, as far as I am able to determine, is a good low-threat computer-adaptive placement test, though educational institutions will still need to make decisions in the way it is to be used or how it should be adapted. When I began my research, I had not realized how much there is still to explore in the area of computerized-placement testing. Two major figures in computers and language teaching, Mark Warschauer and Deborah Healey, have stressed the necessity and potential rewards for further work in the overall CALL field. "Proof is elusive, but as more research is performed, we come closer to having a sense of the role that technology can and should play" (1998: 63). Technology in education is here to stay--our job as educators is to be sure we are using it in the most effective way possible.

APPENDIX 1: CONTENT PERCENTAGES OF *LOEP* TESTS

Computerized Placement Tests - *LOEP*	Approximate Percentage of Test
Reading Skills	
Arts/Humanities	10-15
History/Social Science	10-15
Practical Situations Narrative	10-15
Psychology/Human Relations	10-15
Science	10-15
Sentence Meaning	
Particle, Phrasal Verbs, Prepositions of Direction	10-15
Adverbs, Adjectives, Connectives, Sequence	15-25
Basic Nouns, Verbs	25-35
Basic Idioms	5-10
Language Use	
Nouns, Pronouns, Pronoun Case Structure	10-15
Subject-verb Agreement	20-25
Comparatives, Adverbs, Adjectives	10-15
Verbs	10-15
Subordination/Coordination	20-25

Taken from The College Board (1997). *ACCUPLACER Coordinator's Guide*. Pp. 18-19.

The MindBody Connection in SLA

Linda Steinman

This 50-minute paper presentation was based on one chapter of my recent doctoral study. The title of the study is "Language Narratives: Bridges to SLA Literature and SLA Pedagogy."

"*Language is visceral.*" (Stefan, 2000)

"*Where does the mind begin and the body end – and the mind end and the body begin?*" (Marrone, 1990)

The study

In order to find out what language learners considered important during their second language and second culture acquisition (Research Question 1), I examined a corpus of published language narratives, listed as Appendix A. Six narratives served as principal texts, and ten as support texts (four of the support texts are anthologies). In all, 30 narrativists/learners were represented in the study. While these accounts are not limited to language learning events, but rather are autobiographical stories of acculturation, there are many references to language learning and it was to these comments and events that I attended in this study. I read each text marking references to language and culture acquisition and then coded the marked passages according to themes. I identified six themes that recurred across the corpus of texts; one of these themes was the MindBody connection.

Language narratives as a database

There is support in the research literature for using narratives accounts as data sources in the field of education. Eisner wrote that effective research in education should "make aspects of the world vivid and generate a sense of empathy—help us to know what it feels like" (1995, p. 5). "A singular story will in the magic way some things apply, connect, resonate, touch a major chord (Pachter, 1981, as cited in Glesne, 1998, p. 155). Mitchell and Myles suggested that "the findings of SLA research are not generally presented in a way that is accessible and meaningful to teachers; the agenda of SLA research does not necessarily center on issues teachers consider most

problematic" (1998, p. 31). I am a teacher and these narratives really did allow me to better understand what SLA felt like and to share what Van Manen (1990) called the "lived experience" from the emic, or the insider's perspective.

Some life histories result from personal interviews; those examined in this study did not. These learner accounts were neither shaped nor limited by my questions or my presence-- not the form, not the content, not the decision to tell the story at all. The reports of SLA were unprompted and revealed, as Schumann (1998) suggested, what was on the *participant's* mind rather than what was on the *researcher's* mind.

MindBody

I was surprised to read so many references to the embodied nature of language acquisition. As an ESL teacher, I have always focused on the cognitive-- what is going on in learners' heads. But clearly, much goes on elsewhere. Acquiring a new language, a new culture was often represented in the language narratives as a multi-sensory event. Described were how one FELT (physically) and how one FELT ABOUT (emotionally, affectively). This combination has been called *feltsense* (Gendlin, 1973; Moen, 1991). This perspective is at odds with the rational, scientific Cartesian approach of dualism in which mind and body are considered distinct, with the mind privileged over the body.

An interesting recurring analogy, and I will share some of the passages with you, is that of learning a language and digesting food. Other, more general, physical responses were described. Included as a sub-theme were "visceral responses"; these represented stronger feelings, often an aversion, to a sound or a structure in the language. The body could not get comfortable with what it was expected to do or to say.

Quotes

First, I will present some comments describing the "digestive model" of SLA. (Please note that

the direct quotes from the corpus of language narratives are italicized—the voices of the narrativists/ learners were foregrounded in this study.)

Eva Hoffman, who emigrated from Poland to Canada at the age of 13, wrote:

"I read, tasting the sounds on my tongue, hearing the phrases somewhere between tongue and mind" (1989, p. 186). *"I've become obsessed with words … swallow them and hunger for more … maybe I can incorporate the language, make it part of my psyche and body"* (p. 216). And later, *"Perhaps I've eaten, written enough words so that English now flows in my bloodstream … starts speaking to me from my cells"* (p. 242).

Natasha Lvovich, born in Moscow, studied many languages. She is a "synesthete", a person who sees words as colours and she made many interesting comments on the sensory aspects of language. Writing about her language teacher: *"He would savour a metaphor with his voice – with his mouth – as people do with fine food … with him, I learned how to physically taste words"* (1997, p. 21).

Cora Tolosa was born in Spain and moved to the US. A speaker of seven languages, she was described by her friends as a monument to linguistic capacity. She too wrote as though she were at the buffet table of language learning-- describing languages as if they were items on a menu. *"I do not know how I acquired the taste for words"* (2000, p. 131). About Arabic, *"My mouth tasted mint and spices when I could brighten my speech with* Arabic words*"* (p. 133). And conversely, *"I revisit my German with pain each time I need to read an article because I never quite acquired a taste for it"* (p. 132).

Mary Antin, whose autobiography was first published in 1912, and republished in 1997, referred to her quest for English as "hunger" and then wrote in several ways that *"taking possession of New World was like swallowing down undesirable food"* (p. xvi). Other, more general physical responses were described. Verena Stefan was born in Switzerland, and moved to Montreal where

she learned English and French. According to Stefan, she has four languages but no identity. About French she wrote: *"My being-in-progress doesn't have a body yet in the new languages, maybe a bit of an English body, but almost no French textual body. No feet, no bones, no muscles. The words haven't reached body temperature yet as in writing, when every word of the text to come has to assume one's body temperature to become fully alive … I perceive language viscerally, visually"* (2000, p. 24). "*French is not visceral to me … when I speak French I don't do it from my guts*" (p. 28). And about English: *"Finally there are not only words and words piling up inside me anymore, but a whole language that develops from within my body*" (p. 27).

Doug Millison felt himself changing in many ways when he, married to a Chinese woman, moved to China. "*My face, mouth, lips and throat muscles stretched then strengthened after initial feeble resistance to taking new shapes to form new sounds … my ears tuned to a new pitch of discrimination"* (2000, p. 147).

Ariel Dorfman, bilingual in English and Spanish, lurched back and forth during his life between the two languages. Depending on the political situation, he lived only in English or only in Spanish, refusing to recognize one when the other was in operation—a fascinating example, it seems to me, of a coordinate bilingual. "*Spanish was there at the beginning of my body, or perhaps where my body ended and the world began*" (1998, p. 12). "*I've been flirting with Spanish … but I don't feel Spanish deep inside me*" (p. 153).

Alice Kaplan, a native speaker of English who divorced herself from English and strove to speak, feel, and *be* French, brought the sense of smell and sound together. She wrote about a professor of French literature who was denied tenure at an elite university in the US because of "*… his French 'r' which smelled of New Jersey"* (1993, p. 180). About herself, she described a strong physical reaction to having to suppress French and speak English when she returned to the US. On the plane she *"could feel the French sticking in my throat, the new muscles in my mouth – those were my sounds now"* (p. 70).

I labelled strong reactions to parts of language or a language itself as "visceral responses." Kyoko Mori chose to separate herself from her mother tongue, Japanese, and to embrace English. She disliked and resisted Japanese because the language, she felt, defines women as, and expects women to behave as, acquiescent and inferior. She did not like the childish squeak she heard when she spoke Japanese. "*In Japanese, I have no voice for speaking my mind*" (1997, p. 16). "*The language numbs me. There are words and phrases that women are never supposed to say … We had no language in which to address a stranger even if we had wanted to*" (p. 13). "*My friends and I had no language to speak about sex*" (p. 111).

Lvovich, mentioned earlier in this paper, had to work hard to overcome her aversion to English. This was not a case of finding English difficult, but a case of not liking the language. "*I never really liked English. I had to learn it because it was compulsory in school and after that – because this is the language spoken in America. It always sounded so harsh, so foreign, as if there were no feeling in it, no connection with human reality*" (1997, pp. 56–57).

Eva Hoffman resisted the lack of emotion in English. "*My mother says I'm 'becoming English'. That hurts me because I know she means I am becoming cold*" (1989, p. 146). She also expressed her "strange allergy" to the phrase "you're welcome." "*I can hardly bring myself to say it – I suppose because it implies that there's something to be thanked for, which in Polish would be impolite*" (p. 106). And, she added, "*the very place where language is at its most conventional, where it should be most taken for granted, are the places where I feel the prick of artifice*" (p. 106).

Hoffman wrote of the difference between friend/friendship in Polish and English. A relatively casual term in English, in Polish the word expresses a powerful relationship connoting love. Both Eva and her parents wrestled with this word whose significance is so different in the two languages. Her parents remained unable to call anyone "friend" in Canada-- they referred to these individual as "acquaintances"-- the next best word. Although that was, according to Hoffman, too snobbish a word, the right word did not seem to exist in English. This example represents a situation in which

failure to produce a word was not due to lack of knowledge; the individuals, rather, did not like the word, resisted it because they could not make it their own.

Hoffman offered another example. In Polish there is no common word for self-sufficiency; this attribute is admired in Canada, but not in Poland. Hoffman considered the word and the concept of self-sufficiency "*a comfortless condition, a harsh and artificial ideal. Why shouldn't people help one another?*" (1997, p. 176). Simple adjectives confused Hoffman. "*English kindliness has a whole system of morality behind it, a system that makes 'kindness' an entirely positive virtue*" (p. 108). The Polish word for 'kind', on the other hand, has an element of irony implicit in it.

This dissonance between words and concepts in languages is called "clashes of consciousness" by Clark (1976), "stomach interference" by West (1998), and "language allergies" by Hoffman (1989).

The above examples of MindBody response to language elements are important, I think, for teachers to consider because linguistic "deviance" in the foreign language is most often considered an instructional issue. Teachers assume that non-production means that the learner has not fully grasped the lexical morphological syntactic or phonological concept of the L2. In fact, they may have grasped it but simply choose not to use it. Sometimes it is the language element they do not like, sometimes the cultural behaviour that accompanies it. This raises the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity. Does language change thought? Hoffman, in considering her relationship to a man recalled her bilingual thought processes:

> *Should you marry him? the question comes in English.*
>
> *Yes.*
>
> *Should you marry him? the question echoes in Polish.*
>
> *No.* (1989, p. 199)

Clearly, for this woman, the language she used did indeed change her thoughts.

Elgin, who contrasts medical terms and concepts across languages, wrote:

> The question posed is not "*Does* acculturation change the beliefs ..." and "*Are* the cultures of immigrants transformed ...": those results are presupposed. No room is left here for an alternate resolution in which [people] simply decide that the American English version of events is nonsense and rely on the [perceptions] shaped by their native language instead. (1999, p. 71)

Gendlin (1973, as cited by Moen, 1991, p. 81) wrote

> It is true that a feeling is never there for nothing. A feeling is an interaction with some situation, but it may be a long past one. Such a feeling may spoil a present situation that might have gone well. Perhaps explicating their feelings may generate dialogue, further knowledge that would change the learners' view of the language, the structure, the word.

Target forms may not necessarily be the learners' goals.

Regarding how much of one's own conceptual and linguistic inventory one is willing to change, one of the narrativists in this study, the late Edward Said asked: "*What would you save ... give up ... recover?*" (1999, p. 89).

Resistance exhibited through physical symptoms is often related to identity issues. "We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but also define ourselves through the practices we do not engage in" (Wenger, 1998, p. 164).

Research Questions 2 and 3

Question 2 in the study was: How do the learners' representations of SLA correspond to the theoretical and research literature on SLA? I included five TESL course texts in the SLA literature. At the TESL Ontario conference, I did not discuss the methods or the findings of research question #2. I did summarize the findings from Research Question #3:
How do experienced teachers of ESL relate to these learners' representations of SLA? Are there pedagogical implications?

Six experienced ESL teachers (with 8 or more years of experience) examined quotes from the language narratives, and, after discussion were asked to discuss their responses to the learners' comments. Discussion ranged from body language across languages to ESL

students' levels of (physical) comfort with teaching practices unfamiliar in their L1 context. Implications for teaching raised by the focus group participant teachers included the following suggestions:

- Acknowledge and raise for discussion the physical reactions and possible aversions to second language acquisition. Ask students, from time to time, not only "What do you *know* about this in English?" but also "How do you *feel about* this in English?"
- Create an environment in which students are not only asked about, but feel comfortable enough to raise, the issues of feelings and feelings about the language. Affect and sociolinguistics should be topics for discussion.
- Share with students one's own experiences of discomfort when learning a new language. For monolingual teachers, using excerpts from language narratives might elicit valuable comments from students in the classroom.
- Relax students in any way one can. Members of the focus group did not resolve whether teaching the new language in a style familiar to the students or in a style new to the students (CLT) might be the better route.
- Gradually lead up to activities that might cause discomfort – for example, role-plays – and reconsider activities like these in light of the common dislike by both teachers and students. Consider that non-participation or resistance may be due to issues such as the gender of the teacher or the inexplicability of display questions, rather than assuming a cognitive weakness or an instructional issue..
- Consider whether adopting an English persona is a valuable suggestion to make to students who do not feel comfortable taking on an English self.
- Offer alternatives, but advise of the consequences (e.g., they may be considered rude) when students express their unwillingness to produce aspects of the language.
- Understand that "everything lands on the language." Students' difficulties in their lives outside the classroom (family, economic, social, political) have a significant impact on their language learning. It is never all just about language.

The session participants agreed that attending to not only cognitive states of our students but also to their physical/affective states might well improve teaching and learning.

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Appendix A: Language Narratives

Principal Narratives

A Border Passage	Ahmed, Leila (1999)
Something to Declare	Alvarez, Julia (1999)
Heading South, Looking North	Dorfman, Ariel (1998)
Lost in Translation	Hoffman, Eva (1989)
Hunger of Memory	Rodriguez, Richard (1982)
Out of Place	Said, Edward (1999b)

Supporting Narratives

*Letters of Transit**	Aciman, André (1999)
The Promised Land	Antin, Mary (1997, orig. 1912)
*Reflections on Multiliterate Lives**	Belcher, Diane, and Connor, Ulla (Eds.) (2001)
*Becoming American**	Danquah, Meri-Nana-Ama (Ed.) (2000)
French Lessons	Kaplan, Alice (1993)
The Multilingual Self	Lvovich, Natasha (1997)
Polite Lies	Mori, Kyoko (1997)
Onna Rashiku [Like a Woman]	Ogulnick, Karen (1998)
*Language Crossings**	Ogulnick, Karen (Ed). (2000)
When I Was Puerto Rican	Santiago, Esmeralda (1993)

- Anthologies

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ESL for Foreign-Trained Professionals at Work: A TESL Workshop

Jill Cummings, Jeri Maurice, Donna Snyder (Co-Presenters)

Improving English communication skills for the workplace is a challenge shared by employers, employees, and ESL teachers. *ESL for Foreign-Trained Professionals at Work*, a workshop to assist ESL instructors and administrators in meeting these challenges, was presented at the TESL Ontario conference by co-presenters and collaborators in workplace ESL - Jill Cummings, Donna Snyder and Jeri Maurice.

This presentation attracted more than 35 instructors/administrators affiliated with school boards throughout Ontario as well as teachers from centres such as the Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf, the YMCA New Canadians Centre, and the Multicultural Council of Windsor. The workshop recommended instructional approaches for workplace ESL - i.e. the theoretical background, lesson planning, activities, resources, and tips for teaching foreign-trained professionals.

ESL instructors may at first question how to meet the specific language needs of employees working in highly technical fields (for example, business analysts, engineers, systems designers, programmers...) when the teachers themselves are unfamiliar with the specific jargon. Guiding principles for such lesson planning include: i) content, topics, themes and materials relevant to the work of the learners. Language learning should be purposeful and suit the learner's and employer's goals, and ii) language is best taught through contextualized use using a communicative, task-based approach with a focus on the vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation difficulties and needs of the learners.

The following table illustrates examples of tasks, functions, and language to be considered

Sample Tasks	Functions	Language
Participating in a team meeting to discuss short- and long-term strategies	Comparing & contrasting options Suggesting alternatives Requesting additional information Writing follow-up memos	Vocabulary: idioms, synonyms and opposites Grammar: conditionals Questions – direct and indirect
Present a chart or graph to team members and explain various segments	Describing trends impressionistically forecasting inferring	Vocabulary: modifying words to describe trends, ie: *size/speed/impact* Grammar: adverbs, *substantially, rapidly and remarkably* Strong verbs, ie: *to climb, to sink, to plummet*

Real life case stories were then discussed to illustrate both the language and sociocultural dimensions of language learning/teaching. This generated enthusiastic participation as teachers shared and explained their lesson ideas, activities and materials. Participants were able to take away such ideas and follow-up as: comparing business/social practices in students' home culture and in NA culture; setting up role-plays to practise performance reviews, requesting raises, explaining procedures to a new team member, and giving presentations; using video clips from *Tempopo*, *The Joy Luck Club*, and even *the Dr. Phil Show* as springboards for discussions of cultural values and norms; and giving a tour of the workplace to the instructor.

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For further information about workplace ESL in various regions, contact the presenters at:

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TEAM CHINA MEETS TEAM CANADA:

Facilitating the Transition to Western-Style Teamwork

Martha McIntyre, M.Ed., Queen's School of English

While the concept of teamwork is well-known and well-respected in the west, cultural studies and frameworks for cultural mapping would suggest that the teamwork construct is culture-specific. Therefore, as multicultural teams are forged globally, it is critical for instructors to understand the cultural norms for teamwork in an effort to maximize the potential of multicultural teams in education and business. This paper examines teamwork within the Chinese context and makes recommendations for the instructor who is attempting to facilitate the transition to western-style teamwork for Chinese students.

I will examine four cultural dimensions which might assist the instructor in attempting to bridge eastern and western orientation to teamwork. These dimensions are: language, Confucian values, individualism and power distance. For each dimension, I will provide a brief definition and suggest an application for the instructor who is introducing Chinese students to western-style teamwork.

Language: Gibson (2001) has analyzed the use of teamwork metaphors across cultures and has shown that they vary across countries and organizations. For example, some concepts of teamwork may include clearly differentiated roles, such as leaders and members, whereas others may be less structured. In her study, she showed that people who describe their work team with a sports metaphor are likely to hold such expectations, whereas describing the team as a family captured the expectation that teamwork involves elements of nurturing and support. As a result, unless some members of the team share a common language and theoretical framework, the link between comprehension and action is likely to be tenuous at best.

Application: In order to forge a successful multicultural team, the instructor must have team members explicitly address cultural assumptions. The instructor could begin with a discussion of the members' perception of teams and teamwork in moving toward a common metaphor or description of the team. Even if they aren't readily apparent, there is often the feeling of a shared human experience when people of different cultures discover similarities in their languages. As Hofstede (1980) asserts, "If equivalents of a concept in another language are missing, often we can still transfer the desired meaning by circumlocation" (p. 35).

Confucian Values: Chinese societal behaviour is rooted in Confucian values - the pressure to preserve harmony, to conform, and to avoid loss of face. All of these behaviours are reflected in the 'typical' learning styles modeled by Chinese students. These include an emphasis on the concrete and the need for reconciliation and balance (Chan, 1999). By comparison, western cultural ideals teach learners to use abstract frameworks and to be critical in research. As a result, some western teamwork behaviours may seem alien to their eastern colleagues.

Application: Because the Chinese tend to focus on the concrete, the roles of team members as well as the instructions for the teamwork should be very clearly defined. Chinese team members should be asked directly by the team leader to contribute to discussion rather than waiting for them to volunteer, which may not be culturally acceptable behaviour for them. In assigning tasks to group members, it would be prudent to give the Chinese team members the types of tasks with which they feel most comfortable such as those which focus on the concrete or on the application of examples. As the team develops and tasks become more interdependent, the Chinese team members could be encouraged to work on more abstract problems or on multiple tasks with a western mentor.

Individualism: Hofstede defines individualism as "...the degree to which people in a country prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups" (cited in Lane et al, 2000, p. 91). Historically Chinese society has been organized collectively, compared to the more individualistic tendencies of western society. However, neither collectivity nor individualism is an either/or model for the organization of a society.

Application: Despite historical collectivist thinking, the constraints of hierarchical management (such as not wanting to upstage others until everyone's age/status in a group is detemined) may limit Chinese students from participating as fully and openly as westerners might expect. The instructor must spend considerable time on the process of team development to build trust among team members. A visual representation of the team and members' functions may be useful, especially if all members of the team are supposed to be more or less equal in status. Once the teams are formed, the instructor must encourage team loyalties by ensuring that performance incentives and rewards are shared collectively.

Power Distance: Hofstede defines power distance as "...the degree of inequality among people which the population of a country considers as normal..." (cited in Lane et al, 2000, p. 91). Traditional Chinese society is more hierarchically structured than the west. However, as the Chinese move increasingly toward a market economy, they are likely to become more individualistic and less hierarchical.

Application: It would be prudent for the instructor to explicitly outline how he or she expects the team to function. For example, a participatory team model toward problem-solving could represent a huge ideological shift for Chinese students accustomed to a hierarchical structure within the classroom. It will help the Chinese team members to integrate into the team if they understand the status and role of each team member. To this end, it might help to assign a western leader for each project or phase of a project. The instructor may want to have a Chinese member assist a leader initially and then act as co-leader before assuming such a role him or herself.

The western instructor must be careful to assume neither that Chinese students can easily adapt to a western model of teamwork, nor that they are unwilling to engage in teamwork. Time and patience are required for the transition, as well as clear and explicit guidelines and modeling of the behaviours expected of team members. There is no formulaic model for developing cultural synergy; perhaps the most successful instructors working with Chinese students will develop a new approach to teamwork which incorporates the best features of east and west.

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Immigrant Chinese Students' Perceptions of their English Communicative Competence Relative to their Classroom English Training and their Field

Shenyu Huang

This presentation reports the findings of part of a major research study exploring 13 immigrant Chinese students' perceptions of English teaching in Canada and in China. There has been a dramatic increase of new immigrant students of Chinese descent in Canadian universities over the past few years. These students had scored high enough in the threshold TOEFL test to obtain enrollment, and came with confidence and high expectations. Nevertheless, it has been generally observed that few of these Chinese students do not run into enormous difficulty in academic pursuits as well as in social adaptation, reportedly for lack of English communicative competence. This qualitative study investigated three categories of perceptions among Chinese immigrant students currently enrolled at York University.

1. How do they perceive their English communicative competence after having studied in Canada for at least one year?

2. How do their perceptions relate to the classroom EFL/ESL teaching/learning they previously experienced back in China and are experiencing now in Canada?

3. How do their perceptions relate to their major in Canada and their field in China?

In addition, this study also investigated how Canadian professors perceived Chinese-speaking students. A mini survey was conducted through interviewing 13 immigrant Chinese students and 6 Canadian TESL professors at York University. The findings indicate that in order for Chinese students to improve their English communicative competence, "the teacher-centered, textbook-centered and grammar-centered" English teaching in China has to be reformed, and the English enhancement programs in Canada should be taught in a small-class format to better meet the individual needs of students. The findings also provide advice to Chinese immigrants on their English learning and social adaptation in Canada.

1. Introduction

1.1 Chinese Immigrants in Canada—Lack of English Communicative Competence

There has been a dramatic increase of new immigrant students of Chinese descent in Canadian universities over the past few years—a natural outcome of the most recent immigration influx from China. Prior to their immigration to Canada, most of these students had successfully passed the Chinese CETB-4/CETB-6, China's national standardized examination designed to measure how well the College English Teaching Syllabus requirements are met. They had also scored high enough in the threshold TOEFL test to obtain enrollment in the Canadian university system, and had come with confidence and high expectations. Nevertheless, it has been generally observed that many of these Chinese students run into enormous difficulty in their academic pursuits as well as in their social adaptation, reportedly for lack of English communicative competence. How do we account for this "high scores, low skills" phenomenon?

1.2 Research Purpose

Most comments on the students' English proficiency have come from language assessors or teachers. Little is known about how the students **view** their difficulties and needs. Their own perceptions of their previous English language training in relation to their academic field of study as well as their current problems would have direct educational implications not only for the language remedial programs in Canada, but also for EFL training in China. Such research may also provide useful information for those immigrant students who want to continue their career in Canada.

2. Brief Literature Review

This study explored Chinese students' perceptions of their English communicative competence. The term "communicative competence" needs to be clearly defined in order to make any further discussion meaningful. This is especially so because all the subjects are students from China, where recent attempts to teach English communicatively have been poorly received.

2.1 English Communicative Competence

2.1.1 Communicative Competence

It was not until a theoretical framework was proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) that the concept of communicative competence gradually became something feasible and practical in its pedagogical application to foreign language teaching. Four areas of knowledge and skills were identified that make up communicative competence (Swain, 1984):

1. Grammatical competence: which reflects knowledge of the linguistic code itself, including knowledge of "vocabulary and rules of word formation, pronunciation, spelling, and sentence

formation."

2. Sociolinguistic competence: which "addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately" and includes the ability to produce and understand appropriate utterances and the knowledge of speech acts such as refusals, requests, and expression of emotion.
3. Discourse competence: which "involves the mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified or written text in different genres such as narrative, argumentative essay, scientific report or business letter."
4. Strategic competence: which "refers to the mastery of communication strategies that may be called into action either to enhance the effectiveness of communication or to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting factors in actual communication or to insufficient competence in one or more of the other components of communicative competence." (pp.188-189)

Ever since this approach was defined, there have been all kinds of attempts around the world to apply it to the teaching practice in the classroom, generally in the form of what is known as communicative language teaching (CLT). Great advances have been made, and related theories elaborated.

2.1.2 Communicative Language Teaching in China

One of the pioneers in China who staunchly advocated and practiced CLT is Xiaoju Li of the former Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute. As early as 1979, Li headed a team that later produced *Communicative English for Chinese Learners* (CECL), the first-ever set of English course-books that attempted to apply the communicative approach in EFL in the Chinese context. Without question this bold attempt was met with unprecedented resistance throughout China among ELT professionals (Li, 1984; Li, 1985).

In 1992, the State Education Development Commission (SEDC) introduced a functional syllabus, which explicitly set out a communicative teaching aim: "by training in listening, speaking, reading and writing, to teach students in order to gain basic knowledge of English and competence to use English for communication" (English Teaching Syllabus, 1992, p. 1).

Old habits and traditions die hard. That CLT has met with so much skepticism and resistance in China cannot be understood without looking into the Confucian heritage that has dominated the Chinese mind for some two thousand years. The ELT in China, as in any other field in education, is still heavily influenced by Confucianism. Typically, the problems with ELT can be summed up as being "three-centered": "teacher-centered, textbook-centered, and grammar-centered" (Ting, 1999,

p. 2). The learners' learning style and behaviour towards literacy also reflect the strong impact of Confucian traditions in education. Hu (2002) summarized the learning strategies commonly practiced in the Chinese culture of learning as four R's and four M's—"*reception, repetition, review,* and *reproduction; meticulosity, memorization, mental activeness,* and *mastery*" (pp.100-101).

2.2 Perceptions of English Teaching and Learning

According to contemporary cognitive theories of learning and instruction, the learner is an active processor of information rather than a passive recipient of knowledge. For this reason, learners' perceptions of their own ability and performance have become increasingly important in learning research. With regard to learners' perceptions of communicative competence, which was the focus of this study, Rao (2002) had an interesting study that examined Chinese students' views of communicative activities in the EFL classroom.

Using questionnaire and semi-constructed interview methods, it looked at the perceptions of 30 Chinese university students in China on the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in the EFL classroom. It revealed that the students' perceptions of CLT activities were greatly impacted by the prevalent educational philosophy in China, suggesting that in the Chinese context, communicative activities and non-communicative activities should be reconciled. Insightful as it may be, Rao's study suffers obvious limitations: all the research subjects were current English-major students in China who had never been exposed to an English-speaking environment and had no real communication needs in English.

Therefore, for the sake of curriculum and instructional decision making, it would be complementarily useful to find out how overseas Chinese students perceive their classroom EFL learning experience in China. In another study, Deng's (2002) MRP explored the dynamic process of adaptation of Chinese immigrant professionals in Canada and the role of culture in English teaching and learning for intercultural communication purposes. Also, Xu (2000) explored the problems in non-English major College English teaching in China by using an open-ended questionnaire and a follow-up interview with Chinese visiting scholars in Toronto. She investigated their perceptions of the practicalities and the constraints in improving English teaching for non-English major students by introducing Western-style teaching methods and educational concepts into Chinese classrooms at universities and the changes in their perception after being exposed to English teaching in Canada.

Drawing from the above research findings on methodology and content, the present study looked at university students who came to Canada with a supposedly reasonable command of English. Since they all went through their EFL training in China, it would be significant to find out how they perceived their previous English language training after living and studying in an English-

speaking environment for a significant period of time. As observed and reported, the major difficulty encountered by these people in the process of social adaptation lay in their inadequate "communicative competence" in English. On this basis, this study was designed towards investigating Chinese immigrant students' feelings and beliefs about their English communicative competence, and how their perceptions related to the communicative and/or non-communicative aspects of English teaching in their previous classroom experience in China and their current classroom experience in Canada.

3. Research Project

3.1 Research Questions

1. How do immigrant Chinese students perceive their English communicative competence after having studied in Canada for at least one year?
2. How do their perceptions relate to the classroom EFL/ESL teaching/learning they previously experienced back in China and are experiencing now in Canada?
3. How do their perceptions relate to their major in Canada and their field in China?

3.2 A Qualitative Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was used in this study. The data were mainly collected by a mini survey, using relatively open-ended oral interviews as the means of inquiry. According to Kane & O'Reilly-de Brun (2001), "Mini surveys (small number of questions, small number of respondents) are useful for short projects and can be analyzed easily without a computer" (p. 149). They also pointed out that mini surveys were usually conducted through interviews rather than questionnaires. Moreover, as Price (1991) said, the interview was the best qualitative technique employed in studies of affective factors in L2 learning and in studies of adult ESL literacy, especially concerning personal and experiential aspects of the complex issue of adult L2 acquisition.

The interviews in this study were expected to yield a great deal of retrospective data that revealed the students' interpretations of their lived experiences of EFL learning in China. Moreover, the interviews might also yield some data that revealed the students' perceptions about the ESL training that they received in Canada and how their English communicative competence was influenced by the difference between their major in Canada and their field in China.

This study also involved some observations of ESL classes, through which first-hand data about ESL classroom teaching and learning in Canada were collected in order to make a comparison of EFL classes in China and ESL classes in Canada (See 4.4). Observing natural communication in a

class setting, particularly oral or written interactions among students and between students and teachers, is another important data-collection approach in the L2 survey research (Johnson, 1992). However, observation was kept to a minimum in this study, since its purpose was merely to identify general points of comparison between the language-classroom cultures of China and Canada.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Research participants

Thirteen students from the PRC, who immigrated to Canada within the past 5 years (with a minimum of 1-year experience in Canada), were chosen through "convenience sampling". Cohen and Manion (1994) described such sampling as "choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained." The relative homogeneity of the group ensured an easier control of the possible cultural and societal effects on their experiences and perceptions of EFL training, thus maximizing opportunities for comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Before immigrating to Canada, they had all received EFL classroom training in China for at least 7 years. Moreover, they had all finished education at the university or college level back in China although they graduated from different universities. All participants were recruited from York University, and they were chosen to represent people from different piaces and universities in China and from different fields.

In addition, six Canadian professors at York University also participated in my mini survey. With at least 15 years' ESL teaching experience, they were all directly involved in the teaching of ESL 1000 course at York University, in which there were quite a few Chinese-speaking students. I investigated their perceptions about Chinese-speaking students in their classes through an open-ended 15-minute interviews, thereby enabling me to make a comparison between the professors' perceptions and the students' own perceptions.

The interviewees, both immigrant Chinese students and Canadian professors, were assigned fictitious names. Some of the characteristics of the student interviewees are illustrated in Table A, and those of professor interviewees are illustrated in Table B (See Appendix I).

3.3.2 Researcher's role

In this study, I played the role of researcher, participant, observer and fellow student. As a researcher, I not only interviewed the immigrant Chinese students and the Canadian York professors but also coded and analyzed the data. As an EFL teacher in a university in China and an immigrant Chinese student at York University, I also acted as a participant in this study, providing my

own perceptions of EFL/ESL teaching/learning in the two countries. As an observer, I observed three ESL 1000 classes at York University, taking notes of naturally occurring ESL classroom activities. As a fellow student, sharing the subjects' linguistic, cultural, and academic background, I had the advantage of being able to do the survey with the least intrusiveness, thereby increasing the chances of obtaining more accurate data, making better sense of the subjects' stories.

3.3.3 Interview question design

The interview questions for immigrant Chinese students (See Appendix II) were designed to elicit responses that would help reveal the respondents' views about their development of communicative competence. Most of the questions centered around EFL classroom activities and events, based on my knowledge and experience about the practice of CLT in China. Moreover, the students' present ESL experience in Canada was also involved. It should be pointed out that the interpretation of CLT here was based on its so-called weak definition, which emphasized the importance of providing learners with maximum opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes in the classroom (English Teaching Syllabus, 1992), because this is the version generally accepted in China. In addition, the interview questions were also designed to investigate their perceptions about the difference between their major in Canada and their field in China and the influence of such a difference on their academic success.

A total of 40 questions can roughly be grouped in three sections: 1) ***General background information probe*** (Q1 – Q9). Some direct questions (Q1, Q4, and Q7) in this section were expected to yield similar answers to verify the homogeneity of the research subjects. There was a question (Q3) concerning the interviewees' self-rating of English proficiency. Another two questions—Q8 and Q9—were about their English proficiency evaluated by some widely used English proficiency tests—CETB-4/6 and TOEFL. In addition, these immigrant Chinese students' attitudes towards Canadians (Q5), English and Chinese (Q2), Canadian and Chinese cultural contact (Q1 and Q6), English and Chinese language contact (Q1), and life satisfaction in Canada (Q1) were also investigated in this section. 2) ***Classroom teaching/learning activity recall*** (Q10 – 22). These questions were meant to directly elicit the subjects' recollection of what they had experienced in their EFL classrooms. The main concern being how classroom teaching would affect the development of communicative competence, the questions were very specific about a range of activities that would touch on all four aspects of communicative competence. In this section, one question (Q22) was designed to probe their motivation, which was expected to be of significance. 3) ***Current perceptions*** (Q23 – 40). These were basically questions meant to find out the subjects' present ESL learning situation in Canada and whether their views of and attitudes toward their

former EFL training had undergone any change. Moreover, these immigrant Chinese students' attitudes towards their acculturation process in Canada were also investigated in this section. They were categorized according to Berry's (1980) four modes—integration, assimilation, rejection, or deculturation. It should be pointed out that, although each of the questions in sections 2 and 3 had a clear topic focus, they were made open-ended enough to give the subjects some kind of control and power. In this way, the researcher's risk of obtaining predetermined results was minimized.

Interview questions for Canadian professors at York University (See Appendix III) were designed to elicit responses that would help reveal the respondents' views about both ESL Chinese-speaking students and ESL teaching and learning at York University.

3.3.4 Data collection

Data was collected mainly through individually conducted semi-structured oral interviews. The questions were fine-tuned as individual interviews progressed in order to keep pace with what emerged in the process. The same questions were asked of each participant, though the phrasing could vary in order to guarantee a natural flow of the conversation. While the interviews with Canadian Professors at York University were conducted in English, the interviews with immigrant Chinese students were done in Mandarin and/or English as context required in order to ensure authenticity and undistorted perceptions. Both note-taking and audio-taping were used during the interviews. Taped materials were summarized for analysis, not appended to this paper.

In addition, during my observation of the ESL 1000 classes at York University, field notes were taken along with interviews with the teachers and talking with the Chinese students in the classes.

3.3.5 Data processing and analysis

The data was analyzed using "analytic induction", a coding process of grouping recurring concepts (or themes) under more abstract explanatory categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A careful listening to the participants and an analysis of what they had to say led to the discovery of the issues that were important or problematic for further research, as well as the problems in the design of the initial interview questions.

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the findings about Chinese students' English communicative competence relative to their classroom English teaching and learning in China and Canada.

4.1 Views of their English Communicative Competence

I investigated the interviewees' perceptions of their communicative competence based on Canale and Swain's model which involved four components—grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences.

- Perceptions of grammatical competence

Interviewees who had grammatical competence were expected to use effective and clear English language instead of being demanded to speak native-like English in real communication. I found that all the interviewees had the basic grammatical competence as they were able to express themselves in English effectively and clearly without obvious grammatical mistakes during the interview. In addition, they all scored high in the grammar part of the TOEFL test.

- Perceptions of sociolinguistic competence

Interviewees with sociolinguistic competence were expected to be familiar with the Canadian culture and act appropriately in communication, i.e. they could find culturally appropriate topics in conversation with Canadians. Such competence was investigated through Questions 30 & 31. Most interviewees reported that they had difficulty finding topics in conversation with Canadians. As Taylor said, "Because of the cultural gap, I have difficulty in finding common topics of interest in conversation with Canadians. For example, they are crazy about hockey, but I don't like it and have no knowledge on it." Interestingly, all the interviewees could clearly remember a recent example of their difficulty interacting with English-speaking people, such as misunderstanding others both in academic settings and in daily conversation, communication breakdown due to strong accent, etc.

- Perceptions of discourse competence

Interviewees with discourse competence were expected among other things to be able to sustain a long comprehensive conversation with English speaking people in real life and write a long essay of coherence and cohesion in the academic setting. Such competence was investigated through Question 33. All the interviewees reported confidence in writing a long essay (more than 10 pages) because their study at York University required a lot of essay writing. As for making a 30-minute conversation with their English-speaking friends, all the interviewees reported that they had no problem in such communication, but their performance heavily depended on their conversation partner(s).

- Perceptions of strategic competence

Interviewees who were strategically competent were expected to be able to use compensatory strategies to keep the communication going and fulfil the communicative goals. Such competence was investigated through Question 32. During the interview, I noticed that all the informants had certain skills to use some compensatory strategies in the process of communication. They could find substitute words for the unknown or explain what they wanted to express by paraphrasing or resorting to paralinguistic means.

Such observations matched some York professors' perceptions of Chinese students' English communicative competence. Professor Royal said,

> I think that the Chinese students are not strong when they come to Canada in sociolinguistic competence. They know the grammar; they know the rules; and they had lots of practice of grammar. But are they able to communicate well? Generally not at the beginning. I think it is also just a function that if you're living in China, it is much more difficult to get practice in English than if you're living in San Francisco. You don't have opportunities like you do when you're here. So the Chinese students' weaknesses are in terms of communicative ability. I think that is possibly because of the educational system. They want to do more rote learning than we're doing in Canada. I think they are not used to the whole educational approach that we are using in Canada, which takes time to get used to.

Professor Wiseman also commented,

> I know what the language teaching situation is in China. I think Chinese students have come a long way to have a foundation of language when they come. They use interesting methods which are not necessarily connected to communicative competence, but they are very strong in reading and writing and less strong in listening and speaking. But that's understandable because partly the environment in China doesn't allow for the use of English in natural settings. Therefore, I don't think we could expect more than what we have. Maybe there is some new development. I know some universities are beginning to operate with a lot more English in the classroom and with a mixture of Chinese returning teachers and foreign teachers. It is possible that they can create an environment in their campus in China to have English more alive. But I think the cultural unifying pole of China makes it both a successful foreign English learning country and sometimes not so successful. Definitely, I can compare China to Japan. Japan has a lot more opportunities. You might say, as a rich country, to speak English, their results are completely inferior to Chinese results. I think Chinese system

is much more successful than Japanese system especially in speaking and listening.

Professor Hugo said,

> In many cases, students from Mainland China have had stronger background in grammar than those from Hong Kong, for example. Even though that's not communicative, I think it serves them very well often. They have good foundation. Of course, they need communicative opportunities, but I think that foundation sometime is through very unfashionable, old-fashioned methods of learning—memorization of grammar patterns or that kind of stuff. But I think that works very well in some cases. That is perceived positively by me.

4.2 Views of EFL Teaching and Learning in China

As frequently reported in similar studies of the Chinese English classroom teaching and learning (Ting, 1999; Hu, 2002; Rao, 2002; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Xu, 2000; Hird, 1995; Campbell & Zhao, 1993; Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Chen & Zhang, 1998; Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Rao, 2002; Chen & Zhang, 1998; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Deng, 2002; Xu, 2000), the factors illustrated in Table 1 concerning EFL teaching and learning in China were also found by using "analytic induction" to categorize the data in this study.

4.3 View of ESL Teaching and Learning in Canada

The factors illustrated in Table 1 concerning ESL teaching and learning in Canada were also verified by similar studies (Nunan, 1988; Block, 1996; Savignon, 1997).

4.4 A Comparison of EFL Classes in China and ESL Classes in Canada

Based on my 8 years EFL teaching experience in China, the observation of ESL 1000 classes at York University and the interview data of immigrant Chinese students and Canadian professors at York University, a general comparison of EFL classes in China and ESL classes in Canada is summarized in Table 2.

Items	EFL Classes in China	ESL Classes in Canada	
Teaching Style	Teacher-Centered	Student-Centered	
	Grammar-Focused	Communication-Focused	
	Language Form-based	Content-based	
	Cognitive Style (Rote Memorization)	Experiential Style (Meaningful engagement and authentic language use)	
	Written English Focused	Comprehensive English Teaching	
	Correct Opinion from the teacher	Own Critical Opinion	
Classroom Seating Style	Traditional Chinese Classroom Seating Style (Fixed Row-by-Row and Line-by-Line Seating)	Modern North American Classroom Seating Style (Flexible Lecture-Room Style or Seminar-Room Style)	
Dominant Language in Class	Chinese	English	
Class Size	Big (Around 50 students)	Small (Around 25 students)	
Classroom Atmosphere	Serious & Intense	More fun, Relaxed & Casual	
Classroom Rules	Strict	Loose	
Classroom Activities	Fixed & Uninteresting, Monolithic (Lecture)	Various, Interactive & Interesting (Group discussion, debate, case study, presentation, simulation, and role-play)	
Classroom Organization	Well-organized & formal	Flexible & informal	
Teaching Materials	Mainly Based on Textbooks	Textbook (selective) +a lot of Additional Materials	
Chance to Practice	Less	More	
Relationship between Teachers and Students	Undergraduate	Close	Common
	Graduate	Common (less communication both in and after class)	Common (More communication Both in and after class)
Evaluation	Mainly by formal standard tests	Various methods, such as research essays, oral presentations, the question-and-answer, language work, assignments, quizzes, final open-ended test and participation.	
	One Right Answer	Many Good Answers	
Status	**Teachers**	Authoritative	Equal
	Students	Obedient	
Interaction between Teachers and Students or among Students	Less	More	
Orientation	Test-oriented	Practice-oriented	

4.5 Views of the Relationship between their English Communicative Competence and Intercultural Demands of their Field of Study

4.5.1 Interviewees' Ratings of Linguistic and Intercultural Demands in 12 Different Field at York University

As Martin and Sun (1987) point out, there are great differences in the requirements of linguistic and culture knowledge for successful academic communication in different fields. I let the interviewees use the 1-10 scale to rate the requirements of linguistic and cultural knowledge for successful academic communication in their own field at York University. It is worth pointing out that 5 out of 13 subjects changed their major when studying at York University because their career interests changed since they immigrated to Canada. Table 3 shows the summary of the rating.

Table 3 Linguistic and Culture Demands in 12 Different Fields from an Intercultural Standpoint (Based on Question 27 in the interview questions for immigrant Chinese students)

Field	Linguistic Demands (L2) (1-10 Scale)	Intercultural Demands (1-10 Scale)	
Statistics	2	1	
Physics	3	2	
Music	2-3	4-5	
Computer Science*	4	2	
Administrative Study*	Accounting	7	7
	Marketing	9	9
Geography	Geography Information System	4	1
	Economic Geography	8	8
	Cultural Geography	10	10
Economics*	7-8	7-8	
Environmental Study* (Sustainable Business)	9	9	
MBA	9-10	9-10	
Sociology	9-10	9-10	
Human Resources Management	9-10	9-10	
Education	10	10	

*Changed field between China and Canada

4.5.2 A Generalization of Intercultural Demands in Different Fields

The fields listed above can be grouped on a continuum from high context to low context to provide a general idea on intercultural demands in broad categories of field.

Lowest Context Fields			**Highest Context Fields**
1-3	**4-6**	**7-8**	**9-10**
Pure and Applied Science	***Arts***	***Earth Sciences, Finance, & Economics***	***Social Science, Humanities, Business, & Education***

According to Hall (1977), high and low context refers to the amount of information that a person can comfortably manage.

> HC [High Context] transactions feature preprogrammed information in the receiver and setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. LC [Low Context] transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up what is missing in the context (both internal and external). (Hall, 1977, p. 101)

Cultures can be divided into two broad categories—high context culture and low context culture, based on the amount of background information that must be made explicit to the people in the culture in an interaction. In Hall's (1977) opinion, "high-context cultures make greater distinctions between insiders and outsiders than low-context cultures do. People raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems" (p. 113).

Martin and Sun (1987) transposed Hall's (1987) idea to an analysis of the intercultural contextual demands of academic fields in a 1987 study of Chinese scholars in Canada and analyzed the difference between China and Canada according to field-specific similarities and differences. As in Martin and Sun's study, the present study found that generally speaking, the fields were arranged from low-context (i.e. those whose practices and background knowledge were relatively similar between China and Canada) to high-context (i.e. these fields which exhibited considerable culture-specific contextual difference in the two countries). For instance, *statistics* was judged as a relatively "universal" field, while *education* was judged as a relatively culture-specific field.

Based on Hall's (1977) and Martin and Sun's (1987) ideas, we could generalize the findings of the present study and arrange all the fields along a continuum ranging from high context fields to low context fields. While the high context field is very culture-specific and has much more intercultural demands, the low context field is more universal all over the world and has much less intercultural demands. People in a high context field need to know not only the field-related knowledge but also the outside culture in a particular area because such field-related knowledge is quite different from culture to culture and people in such a field often send more culture-specific information implicitly and tend to stay well informed on many subjects.

People in a low context field usually share more common knowledge across cultures and tend not to be well informed on subjects outside of their own interests. Obviously, while success of adaptation to the high context field really connects to the understanding of the broad culture, success of adaptation to the low context field mainly depends on the grasp of academic knowledge in the field. Broad categories of field by intercultural demands can be generalized from the data in Table 4. Therefore, it could be hypothesized that, other things being equal, it would be easier for Chinese scholars and immigrants to adapt within a low-context field than a high-context one.

4.6 Views of Chinese Immigrant Adaptation in Canada

4.6.1 The Acculturation Intentions of Chinese Immigrants in Canada

Twelve of 13 interviewees showed a preference for integration over other three modes of acculturation—Assimilation, Rejection and Deculturation. Such a research result was similar to that of most other studies which showed that minority group members prefered integration over other modes of acculturation (Berry & Kim, 1988).

4.6.2 Interviewees' Life Satisfaction

Table 5 shows the relationship among the interviewees' English skills, intercultural demands of their fields, and their life satisfaction in Canada.

Name	Self-ratings of English Proficiency in Canada (Total: 20 points)	Intercultural Demands of their Fields (1-10 Scale)	Life Satisfaction (Summarizing the Interviewees' Words)
Taylor	9.5	2 (low-context)	Good
Bridget	18	9-10 (high-context)	Good, Very Nice
Helen	15	1 (low-context)	Good (Environment)
			Bad (No Friends)
William	17	9-10 (high-context)	OK
Louise	16	9-10 (high-context)	Good
Sophia	17	10 (high-context)	OK
Derek	15.5	7-8 (high-context)	Bad (Employment)
			Good (Environment)
Steven	15	2 (low-context)	Good
Fanny	14	7 (high-context)	Good
Tina	13	4-5 (low-context)	Good
Wilma	10	9 (high-context)	Bad
Hubert	18	2 (low-context)	Good (Study)
			Excellent (Environment)
Susan	16	8 (high-context)	Good

Obviously, those with good English skills tended to get life satisfaction more easily in Canada, such as Hubert and Bridget, while those with relatively poor English skills tended to feel unsatisfied. The data in the above table can also prove the hypothesis put forward before, i.e., other factors being equal, it would be easier for Chinese immigrants to adapt within a low-context field than a high-context one. For example, although Taylor, Helen, Steven and Tina did not have excellent English skills, they still felt satisfied with the life and study in Canada because they were all in low-context fields. On the other hand, Derek and Wilma did not feel satisfied with the life and study here because they were both in high-context fields. The relationship among English, intercultural demands of the field and life satisfaction may be illustrated in the following diagram.

			Typical Examples
OK	High-context Field	Happy ☺	Bridget
English	Low-context Field	Happy ☺	Hubert
NOT OK	High-context Field	Unhappy	Wilma
	Low-context Field	Happy ☺	Taylor

Some interviewees changed their major. If the change was from a high-context field to a low-context field, they usually felt happier. Otherwise they tended to feel stressed and frustrated.

Of course, there are other possible sources of stress in people's lives such as marital status, family, age, economic situation, and personality.

4.6.3 Language Attitudes

Masgoret and Gardner's (1999) model suggests that "Integrativeness (a positive attitude towards the host culture and language) may motivate the individual to seek out an increasing number of contacts within the host community", thus promoting the achievement in the second language (p. 219). The following table shows the interviewees' language attitudes based on Question 2 in the interview for immigrant Chinese students.

Table 6 Interviewees' Attitudes towards English and Chinese

Chinese Immigrants	Preferred Language	"How do you like to communicate in English?"
Taylor	Both English and Chinese	"I like it very much."
Bridget	Both English and Chinese	"So far, I feel **more comfortable** with using English, but in the beginning, I don't think so. I preferred speaking Mandarin for a long time—about 2 years. **In the past year, I suddenly realized that I would like to speak English sometimes rather than speak Chinese.** I don't know why. It depends on the topics and whom I am talking to. That's a big change for me actually. For example, if we talk about some exercises, I prefer speaking English. ...As for the topics of daily life such as eating, clothing and TV programs, I prefer using Mandarin with my husband. But when we watch TV together with my roommate who cannot speak Mandarin well, we prefer using English to talk."
Helen	Both English and Chinese	"**At first, I felt scared and nervous to communicate in English**. I always paid attention to every word spoken by the English-speaking people and tried my best to listen very carefully so that I could understand them. Gradually, I become comfortable because **most Canadians are so nice** that they treat you as a non-native speaker and can tolerate your slow speed and the mistakes."
William	No preference	"I feel **comfortable** to communicate in English."
Louise	Both English and Chinese	"I **like** to communicate in English, but **I cannot express my deep feelings in English**. If I feel the great pressure of study or I feel very unhappy, I cannot express such feelings to English-speaking people in English. ...I can only share such feelings with my Chinese friends in Chinese."
Sophia	Both English and Chinese	"I **like** to communicate in English, and I feel **comfortable** to speak English."
Derek	English	"I do **like** to communicate in English with as many English-speaking people as possible."
Steven	English	"I **like** to communicate in English very much because **English is a new language, a new skill, and a new key to open a new door**."
Fanny	Both English and Chinese	"I **like** to communicate in English, but I feel it is hard for me to communicate in English."
Tina	Chinese	"I **like** it very much."
Wilma	Chinese	"I **don't like** to communicate in English."
Hubert	Both English and Chinese	"I **like** to communicate in English, but not very much. I still feel there are some **difficulties** in using English."
Susan	Both English and Chinese	"I **like** to communicate in English, but not very much."

4.6.4 Attitudes towards Canadians

Obviously, attitudes towards Canadians can influence one's contact with the host community, thus influencing the second language acquisition. The following table shows the interviewees' attitudes towards Canadians.

Table 7 Interviewees' Attitudes towards Canadians

Chinese Immigrants	"Do you have English-speaking friends now in Canada?"	"How do you like making English-speaking Canadian friends?"	Opinions on Learning English from English-speaking Friends
Taylor	"No"	"I like it."	"One of the best ways."
Bridget	"Yes. I have 2."	"I like it."	"One of the best ways."
Helen	"Yes"	"I like it."	"They give me many suggestions to use and learn English."
William	"Yes. I have a few."	"I don't make English-speaking friends on purpose. However, sometimes we get together, talk, share common interests or work in the same field, so we have more to say. Sooner or later, we become friends."	"I don't think I learn quite a lot from those friends."
Louise	"Yes. I have a few."	"I like it. They are nice to me."	"One of the best ways."
Sophia	"Yes. I have several."	"I enjoy talking to them."	"One of the best ways."
Derek	"No"	"I like it very much."	"It is the best and the most effective way."
Steven	"No"	"I like it very much."	"One of the best ways."
Fanny	"No"	"I like it."	"One of the best ways."
Tina	"Yes. I have a few."	"I like it very much."	"I can learn some typical Canadian expressions in daily life."
Wilma	"Yes. I have a few."	"I don't like it."	"One of the best ways."
Hubert	"No"	"I like it very much."	"One of the best ways."
Susan	"Yes. I have many."	"I like it, but I don't go out of the way to make Canadian friends."	"It is a better way to learn spoken English—some authentic and simple expressions."

Most of the interviews agreed that learning English from English-speaking friends was one of the best ways to learn English.

4.6.5 Language and Cultural Contact

No matter if the influence is direct or indirect, language and cultural contact is vital to the improvement of ESL students' communicative competence.

Eight of 13 subjects never used English at home. Other six subjects sometimes used English at home but did not use it very much. The detailed information is shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Interviewees' Language and Cultural Contact

Chinese Immigrants	English Use at Home	English Use in Social Activities	Frequency of Participation in Activities Involving English-speaking People
Taylor	0%	5%	Seldom
Bridget	20%-30%	At moderate level. (around 50%)	Sometimes
Helen	0%	10%	Never
William	0%	20%	Never
Louise	10%	20%	Seldom
Sophia	A little bit.	20%	Sometimes
Derek	10%	Less than 10%	Never
Steven	0%	Before coming to York University 70%-80%	Before coming to York University—Quite often "I attended—Toronto Choral Society. I enjoyed singing and talking with English-speaking people."
		At York University 20%-30%	At York University Never
Fanny	0%	20%	Never
Tina	5%	20%-30%	Never
Wilma	0%	10%	At least twice a month
Hubert	0%	60%	Pretty often
Susan	0%	50%	Seldom (less than five times per year)

4.6.6 Canadian and Chinese Identification

To the question "How do you identify yourself now?", 11 out of 13 the interviewees gave the same response. They all identified themselves as Chinese though they had been in Canada for some time.

5. Conclusions and Future Directions

5.1 Implications

Although generalizations cannot be made on the basis of this one small study, the interview results do reveal the complexity of adult L2 learning, which involves factors pertaining not only to the learners themselves, but also to the socio-environmental contexts in which L2 is learned and used. A better understanding of how learners perceive their own learning has educational implications for curriculum development and classroom teaching.

English language support programs abound, but how much do they help? Many content-based ESL courses put heavy emphasis on reading and writing and less attention on speaking and very little on listening. The results are generally not very satisfactory. As we all know, remedial programs work best only when they dovetail the real needs of the students. However, how much do we know about these Chinese students' real problems?

Differences in learners' experiences and perceptions of L2 learning are valuable information for educators and ESL/EFL teachers. Since learners' beliefs about language learning may have a significant impact on how they go about it, it is important for curriculum decision-makers to be aware of learners' perceptions of how the L2 learning task should be accomplished. If the overseas Chinese students value their traditional learning style so much, it becomes essential to ensure that any ESL remedial programs take this into serious account and be flexible in pedagogical arrangement, allowing the students to explore alternative ways of learning. With reference to the finding that the students perceived their former EFL training effective and successful, it is crucial to make them feel that the remedial programs are arranged to empower them by building on their previous knowledge and competence rather than forcing them to "unlearn" what they have been cherishing so much.

The curriculum should try to create links between the students and the "real" communication needs in the community, so that classroom activities could be geared toward the specific needs of the students rather than for the sake of language forms to be practiced. All in all, a good teacher should try to understand his/her students' feelings and beliefs and adjust his/her teaching approaches accordingly with maximum flexibility to ensure effective learning.

5.1.1 Educational implications to EFL teaching in China

- Reform the traditional English classroom teaching

In order to improve English teaching in China, the traditional "teacher-centered", "textbook-centered", and "grammar-centered" should be reformed (Ting, 1999, p. 2). First of all, big classes should be made smaller if possible. Second, more variety of activities should be incorporated in classroom teaching, such as group work and presentation, to provide students with more opportunities to communicate. Third, the teachers should "teach communication skills and also tap into students' habit of memorizing text and language chunks", in order to help students improve both fluency and accuracy in English (Ting, 1999, p. 4). In other words, Chinese teachers of English should not completely abandon the traditional teaching method. As Ting (1999) points out, "traditional wisdom may be useful in tackling modern problems, and this part of tradition is what we should treasure and cherish" (p. 4).

- Reform the traditional evaluation concept

Teaching style is very closely related to the evaluation concept. Chinese teachers of English should focus on more subjective aspects like presentations, speaking testing, and essay writing in their teaching and evaluation.

- Improve teachers' qualifications

One great barrier to improving English teaching in China is the teachers' qualification. Most teachers have no chance to go abroad to improve their English and learn English culture in an English-speaking environment. Therefore, their English is most often a sort of Chinglish. On the other hand, although there are more and more native-speaker English teachers in China, many of them lack training in English teaching theory and methods. Strictly speaking, they should not be expected to know how to teach the English language and culture to Chinese students. In short, qualifications of both Chinese and native-speaker English teachers should be greatly enhanced in order to improve teaching English in China.

5.1.2 Educational implications to ESL teaching in Canada

The following section outlines the implications and recommendations drawn from the findings of this study for the ESL teaching in Canada, specifically at York University.

- Smaller classes

To maximize English learning, there should ideally be 10-15 students in one class. In large classes, as Professor Wiseman said, "the professor has difficulty getting to know the(se) students as individuals." "In the circumstances like in ESL 1000 courses," Professor Einstein said, "the classes are far too big to really serve every student's needs. They should really be half the size they are to give the students' attention that they really need to succeed in academic ESL settings."

- Focusing on individual's needs

"Language teachers need to continuously negotiate with students to reach a shared understanding of their teaching/learning preferences, and their comfort in dealing with cross-cultural issues and materials" (Tudor. 2001. p.213). Most Chinese students, for example, need great help to improve their Sociolinguistic Competence in which they usually have the most difficulty (as reported in this study, also see Section 4.1), while students from elsewhere may need more help in other aspects. Ideally, ESL teaching should identify every student's weakness and cater to individual needs. Smaller class size may facilitate this.

- Variety of teaching materials

A textbook may be useful in class, but the teacher should, through consultation with the students, give out additional materials which may be about some hot and interesting topics. The teacher could organize discussions based on the topics. Audio-visual materials should also be introduced into English classroom teaching to maintain students' interest. The materials should be closely related to the students' life and study in Canada. Besides, the teaching materials should not only involve informal simple daily language but also involve formal academic language. The language focus should be kept as close to learners' individual field as possible.

- Various classroom activities

There should be a wide variety of ESL classroom teaching activities. Teacher-centered should be combined with student-centred learning. More practice activities should be organized around the teaching objectives. Besides such activities as group discussion, debate, role-play, case study, or presentation, attention should also be paid to such study skills as note-taking and understanding lectures.

- Casual classroom atmosphere

Casualness does not mean that there are no rules and no expectations. Teachers should try to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom where the students could feel comfortable to take chances. Teachers should give the students opportunities to practise and develop communicative ability and engage in more critical thinking.

- Culture teaching

As part of cultural education, ESL teaching should include Canadian custom and etiquette. Chinese students should learn what to say and what not to say, in addition to how to say it. ESL teaching should go beyond the classroom and reach out to all aspects of cultural life in Canada.

- ESL teachers should be patient, encouraging and approachable.

ESL students' speaking is usually slow and full of mistakes or inappropriateness. Therefore, ESL teachers should act with full awareness and be patient to the students' slow speech. Correction of errors should be done in an encouraging and constructive manner. Moreover, the teachers should be approachable so that the students could ask questions freely and immediately.

- ESL teachers should be sensitive to multicultural situation in Canada.

As Professor Royal said, "It really makes a difference whether a teacher is a sensitive person in general and accepting of cultural diversity." All the professor interviewees agreed that if a York professor had some personal knowledge of China and Chinese educational system, he/she could be very positive to Chinese students and better help Chinese students meet their needs in improving their English.

5.1.3 Advice to Chinese immigrant students' learning English

- More contact with English language and culture

All the interviewees realized the importance of English language and culture contact to their English learning. This is especially true in Toronto, where there is a large population of Chinese speakers. To increase their number of opportunities to speak English, they should make Canadian friends, take part in more Canadian social activities, do volunteer work and practise speaking with native English speakers. In this way, they learn common conversation topics.

Professor Lincoln commented that all her successful students—Chinese, Russian or whatever — were the ones who interacted with Canadians or other English-speaking people. In other words, such successful students managed to go beyond their native groups outside class activities. For many Chinese, this is extremely hard to achieve. The major issue is to make Chinese immigrants feel more comfortable in the Canadian context and make them break the Chinese circle of communication. Chinese immigrants should try to integrate into the English speaking environment instead of clinging together among themselves.

- Including teaching Canadian culture with language

Language learning cannot be separated from culture learning. If one does not know the culture in which the language is rooted, he/she cannot find an appropriate topic in the conversation with native speakers. Sometimes, even grammatically correct sentences may be misunderstood or considered rude or impolite. Therefore, Chinese immigrants should cultivate an awareness of cultural differences and acquire Canadian culture with English language learning in order to improve their Sociolinguistic Competence in which they have the most difficulty among the four areas of communicative competence described by Swain and Canale (as reported in this study, also see Section 4.1).

- Cultivating good learning habits

Good learning habits could help Chinese immigrants improve their English a lot. Watching TV and movies, listening to the radio, reading newspapers, visiting English websites, keeping an English journal, and so on, should all become part of the language learning experience.

5.1.4 Advice to Chinese immigrants on adaptation in Canada

It is not easy for Chinese immigrants to merge into the mainstream in Canada, but the following tips based on this study should help them adapt more easily.

- Chinese immigrants with good English skills tend to adapt easily in Canada

This study showed that Chinese immigrants with good English skills adapted more easily than those with limited English skills did. All the subjects admitted that a lack of English communicative competence was one of the greatest barriers to their successful adaptation in Canada. Therefore, to adapt well in Canada, the only way for them is to improve their English communicative competence.

-

- Chinese immigrants in low-context fields tend to adapt easily in Canada

Chinese immigrants in low-context fields tend to adapt easily in Canada. Those who changed their fields from a high-context one to a low-context one usually felt happier than those who moved from a low-context field to a high-context field. Though different fields had different linguistic and cultural demands, some fields of study were perceived in the same way between China and Canada, for example, mathematics, pure science, engineering, and computer science. As Professor Wiseman said,

For many fields, however, there is a culture difference inside the field between China and Canada because China and Canada have different historical traditions, different societies, and different values. So a field purchases a lot of value orientation or cultural information. Naturally I think that these high-context fields are more difficult for the Chinese students to find a connection with the ways in which the subject is taught in Canada.

Therefore, it is recommended that Chinese immigrants choose to study or work in the low-context fields in Canada, where they could succeed more easily.

- Integration recommended

Most Chinese immigrants wanted to maintain equally positive relations to both Canadian and Chinese cultures. They would feel less stressed and happier if they are in the integration mode, which is highly recommended in Canada.

5.2 Future Research Directions

Although findings from this mini survey need to be confirmed with other groups in a larger scale, I believe that this small study has shown the worth of conducting further research on the students' perceptions. A longitudinal case study research on similar subjects, preferably with a larger sample group, would help us understand how the students' perceptions change over time and how such changes affect the development of their English communicative competence.

Moreover, such a longitudinal study with a larger sample group consisting of immigrant Chinese students from many more different fields would prove useful. It would provide us with more information on how the academic success in their field is influenced by their English communicative competence and even how their adaptation to the Canadian society and their career development are impacted by their English communicative competence. We also need to investigate whether and how the students' perceptions would vary with such variables as gender, personality, motivation, etc.

Further research could also look at the strategies chosen by these Chinese students when coping with English communication, and whether and how the strategies are affected by the change of their perceptions.

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The Author/Presenter

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Editors Note: Profiles of interviewees and list of questions asked have been omitted due to space constraints.

ISSUES RELATING TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GRAMMAR CORRECTION IN L2 WRITING

The Quest for a Justifiably Reduced Marking Load

Julia Williams

Many ESL teachers spend a significant amount of time providing grammar correction to student writing with the hope that it will improve the students' written accuracy. Many ESL teachers may also be frustrated by the lack of obvious improvement in grammatical accuracy, as they correct the same errors over and over again throughout the course of the term. It was in this frame of mind that I began to look at some of the research related to the effectiveness of grammar correction in general, hoping that research would definitively demonstrate that grammar correction was not an effective way to improve student writing. My reasoning was that if research indicated that grammar correction was not useful for students, then I could throw off the time-consuming yoke of correction, and inform my students with confidence that grammar correction would not improve their writing.

What I discovered was that despite a large number of studies, the research relating to whether or not grammar correction was an effective way to improve student writing was inconclusive. Furthermore, the original question could be divided into several related questions that highlighted salient issues relevant to error correction. Here is the list of questions. An attempt will be made to answer each question with reference to relevant research.

1. Is grammar correction an effective means to improve student writing?

2. What kind of grammar correction is most effective (comprehensive, selective, direct, indirect, coded, or uncoded)?

3. Are teachers consistent in their marking?

4. What strategies do students use to respond to grammar correction?

5. Do some errors "respond" better to correction than others?

6. What are the most effective patterns of teacher response?

Is grammar correction an effective means to improve student writing?

There has been a significant amount of research that attempts to answer this question. Researchers are lined up on either side of a hotly disputed dividing line. Semke (1984), Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986), Kepner (1991), Sheppard (1992), most notably Truscott (1996) and Fazio (2001) all suggest that grammar correction is at best useless, and at worst, damaging.

For example, Kepner (1991) performed research with two groups of Spanish students over the course of 12 weeks. The first group of students received grammar correction with grammar rule "reminders" while the second group received no grammar correction and feedback relating to content only. The results demonstrated that at the end of the term, there were no significant differences in the grammatical ability of the two groups. Furthermore, the second group of students had higher quality content in their writing. This research was largely regarded as evidence that grammar correction does not improve grammatical ability (or content quality).

Truscott (1996) was particularly vehement that grammar correction is ineffective, arguing that

a) there are too many theoretical problems with grammar correction. For example, L2 acquisition follows developmental sequences (Krashen, 1997) and students are not ready to receive error correction that does not match their developmental stage. It would be virtually impossible to track the developmental stage of each student in a class.

b) there are too many practical problems with grammar correction. For example, teachers are often inconsistent in how they interpret grammatical errors, and may neglect to correct all the errors of one type in one assignment. This may lead to student confusion.

c) there is reason to believe that grammar correction is harmful. For example, students often shorten and simplify their writing in response to grammar correction.

d) there are no reasonable arguments in favour of grammar correction. For example, students may say they want grammar correction, but this does not mean that teachers should provide error correction if it is known that correction is not useful.

The opposing side, researchers who suggest that grammar correction is an effective way to improve student writing, also has its advocates. Lalande (1982), Fathman and Whalley (1990), Ferris (1999), Ashwell (2000), and Ferris and Roberts (2001) have all completed research that demonstrates grammar correction is useful.

Fathman's and Whalley's 1990 research experimented with four groups of students over the course of one writing assignment. The first group received no feedback, the second received grammar correction only, the third received content feedback only while the fourth received both content feedback and grammar correction. The results indicated that grammar feedback improved grammar accuracy, content feedback improved content quality, content and grammar feedback improved content and grammar while group one also improved without having received the benefit of feedback. These results suggested not only that grammar correction is useful, but that revision is important in its own right (even group one improved).

As a result, my quest to find a definitive answer to my question was thwarted. It appeared that the arguments on both sides are substantial. This led to the second question.

What kind of grammar correction is most effective?

If I could not confidently inform my students that grammar correction was ineffective and argue for its abandonment, then my next wish was that the least time-consuming type of grammar correction was at least as effective as the most time-consuming type of grammar correction. Then, at least, I would be able to reduce, hopefully guilt free, the amount of time I spent marking. In fact, the research tends to support my goal to correct more quickly, with maximum efficiency.

Researchers have defined a number of terms that represent unique styles of correction. **Comprehensive correction** involves the correction of all the errors in an assignment. All grammatical errors are weighted equally in this method of correction. For example, lexical errors are corrected as well as syntactical errors; no one error takes priority. **Selective correction** involves correction of the errors that the teacher judges to most significantly impede comprehensibility.

Some grammatical errors may be completely ignored. With **direct or overt correction,** the teacher locates grammatical errors and provides the correct form for the student while with **indirect correction**, the teacher simply locates the errors, and may or may not supply a correction code (for example SVA for subject-verb agreement error) without providing a correct form.

The research of Robb, Ross and Shortreed (1986) indicates that less time-consuming correction methods (selective and indirect) are just as effective as more time-intensive methods (comprehensive and direct). Further, Ferris and Roberts (2001) demonstrate that while students prefer a direct, or at least a coded method of correction, simply locating errors (indirect) is as effective as using coded correction. This study also discovered that lexical errors were the easiest for students to self-edit, while syntactical errors were the most difficult for students to identify in their

own reading. It should be noted that Lee (1997) completed research indicating that although error feedback (location of errors only) is generally more desirable than direct correction, lower level students require more direct correction, while higher level students require only indirect correction.

This research essentially justified my wish to correct in a time-efficient manner by using selective and indirect correction, and led to the next question:

Are teachers consistent in their correction?

A careful examination of my own conscience suggested an answer to this question, which was confirmed by research. Teachers are not consistent in their correction.

Zamel's research in 1985 revealed the embarrassing extent to which teachers are inconsistent with correction. The study analyzed teacher responses to student writing and demonstrated that teachers often misinterpret student meaning, correct inaccurately, respond to surface errors while ignoring content errors, and make corrections so generally that they do not help students. In 2002, Yates and Kenkle built upon this research by reconfirming Zamel's thesis (that teachers are inconsistent in their correction) and suggested that teachers assume an "interlanguage perspective" towards student writing that recognizes a student's prior knowledge and considers a student's writing from the student's perspective. Without this form of perspective, teachers risk misinterpreting student text, and imposing correction that may not reflect the student's original meaning.

Certainly, some of my own students have brought me their corrected writing and told me that I didn't understand what they were trying to write. There are probably more of my students who simply never bothered to tell me that I misunderstood them. Which suggests the next question is integral to the likely effectiveness of error correction.

Are students motivated by grammar correction?

Once again, researchers line up on opposite sides of this issue. Truscott (1996), Fazio (2001) and Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) suggest that grammar correction absolutely does not motivate students, with the latter study revealing that most students did no more than make a "mental note" in response to the grammar feedback they received. On the other hand, Lee (1997) maintains that as students are unable to locate the errors in their own writing, they rely on feedback in order to help them locate their mistakes. Further, Ashwell (2002) found that students rely on feedback to prompt them to make changes to their writing.

All teachers intuitively know that some students are more motivated than others, and not all students are motivated by the same stimulus. The importance of student motivation is now being recognized by a growing body of research, not all of it related to error correction.

Do some types of errors "respond" better to correction than others?

This question led me to research that explained why I was correcting the same error over and over again. Some types of errors do seem more correctable than others. Truscott (1996) stated that morphological, lexical and syntactical knowledge is learned in different ways. As a result, there is no one correction method that will allow students to progress in all three areas. Lee (1997) demonstrated that surface errors were the easiest for students to correct, while meaning errors were the most difficult. And Ferris and Roberts (2001) determined that "treatable errors" are those bound by rules, and can be corrected with indirect feedback. They called idiomatic errors "untreatable errors", or errors not bound by rules, and recommended teachers use more direct feedback to correct these. Their research indicated that sentence structure errors and word choice errors where respectively the most difficult and the least difficult for students to correct.

What are the most effective patterns of response?

Research by Ashwell (2000) identified patterns of teacher feedback, specifically, content feedback on a first draft, followed by form (grammar) feedback on a second draft as the most effective pattern of response to improve student writing. In addition, Ashwell asked if it was necessary to separate content and form feedback. The experiment was conducted with four groups of students; each group received unique patterns of response. The results demonstrated that form, or grammar feedback, had a great ability to improve a student's form. Content feedback had a lesser ability to improve student content. However, mixed feedback, that is content and form together, produced the greatest amount of improvement in content and grammatical accuracy. This suggests that the two types of feedback need not be offered separately.

In conclusion, did I really have a justified case for a reduction in my correction load? Could I really tell my students that error correction of their writing was ineffective? Unfortunately, the research would not allow me to be so definitive. However, I do have a reasonable case to justify a reduction in the time I spend correcting. This is what I have learned.

1. It would not be morally justifiable If I provided no feedback to students; any final evaluation of their skill level requires that I grade their work for grammatical accuracy. Therefore, the question is not 'should' but rather 'how' I provide feedback and what I should correct.

2. Indirect correction is just as effective as direct correction, is less time consuming, and reduces teacher error.

3. Direct correction works well for idiomatic or "untreatable" errors and for lower level students.

4. Indirect correction works well for rule-bound, or "treatable" errors, and for higher level students.

5. Teacher response should be accurate and consistent and should incorporate an interlanguage perspective.

6. Students can cope with content and form feedback at the same time.

7. Revision is essential.

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EFFECTIVE ACTIVITIES FOR EAP

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This paper will describe two activities that promote the development of all language skill areas, and increase students' independence in their language learning through self- and peer-evaluation. These activities are appropriate for lower intermediate to advanced students. Although developed for an intensive English for Academic Purposes course, the activities can be adapted for use in different programs.

I. CURRENT EVENTS ASSIGNMENT

Rationale and Overview:

This activity helps EAP students to develop their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. The students will select a current events article of their choice, and write a summary and response. The students will also present a summary of their article to a small group, and lead a short group discussion. In addition, students are encouraged to engage in peer- and self-evaluation.

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into small groups. I have found groups of four students to be optimal for the discussions.

2. If the teacher wishes to observe and/or evaluate each student's complete presentation and discussion at least once, this is more easily managed if the students remain in the same groups for at least 4 weeks (if this is to be a weekly activity). In addition, the students should present in the same order each week, as all the groups are presenting at the same time, and the teacher will only be able to observe one complete presentation during a given time slot, and will go to a different group after each presentation. I have found this arrangement to be the most effective as the teacher is able to visit each group at least once during the weekly presentations, and is able to observe different students' presentation each week by going from group to group.

3. A few days before the presentations are scheduled, each student brings an article (or two) to class to show the teacher and group members to make sure that the article is "appropriate", (i.e., articles about a certain topic) are of a sufficient length, and that students in the same group do not choose the same article. Alternatively, the teacher can select four articles, and then each student in each group selects one of those articles. This arrangement is advantageous as students can read an article together and discuss the meaning, vocabulary, etc. before writing

their own summaries. The students present their summaries in their original groups, much like a jigsaw activity. The other advantage is that the teacher is already familiar with all the articles. The other option has different advantages. For example, it can be motivating as students are encouraged to select own articles; it also encourages students to read more extensively as they have to find and select articles themselves.

4. After selecting the articles, the students write a summary and response to their articles, as well as discussion questions. It is helpful to complete one assignment together as a class in order to demonstrate and model the activity for the students.

5. On the day of the presentations, the students bring their completed assignment to class, which are submitted to the teacher either before or after the presentations and group discussions have been completed.

6. During each presentation, the listeners take notes and write a short summary at the end. A note-taking form is distributed to the students before the presentations, and collected at the end. This helps the listeners to practice note-taking skills and active listening.

Evaluation:

1. Make sure that the students in each group present in the same order at each session, and that the students start each presentation at the same time. This enables the teacher to evaluate each student's complete presentation and discussion at least once, as the teacher will be going from group to group.

2. The students may also complete a self-evaluation and/or peer-evaluation of the presentations and discussions.

3. The written work will be evaluated by the teacher.

CURRENT EVENTS ASSIGNMENT

First, choose a newspaper or newsmagazine article that is interesting to you. After reading the article, and writing a summary and response, present your article in your group. Each presentation, including a short discussion based on the article, should last about 15 to 20 minutes.

Preparation:

1. **Article**

- Find a newspaper or newsmagazine article (about 500-1000 words in length) that you find interesting and important.

2. Summary

- Write a summary of the article (about 100-200 words).
- Please use your own words to explain the main ideas of the article.
- You can focus on the 5 Ws: who, what, where, when, why.
- Please include the title, author, and source of your article [name of newspaper, date, page number (s)].

3. Response

- Write a response to the article — words; i.e., explain your own opinion and/or your reaction to the article (100-200 words);
- explain why you chose this article and why you think this is an important topic.
- Explain whether or not you agree with the article.
- Explain how reading the article made you feel?

4. Discussion Questions

- Write 2 discussion questions based on the topic of your article.
- Remember: A discussion question focuses on people's opinion about the topic.

<u>The assignment:</u>

- must be neatly hand-written or typed, and double-spaced,
- include the number of words in your summary and response,
- include discussion questions,
- include the newspaper article.

Presentation:

1.Show the article to your group and describe the source of the reading, the writer and the subject area.

2.Give a short presentation about the article. You should know your article well enough to be able to talk about it using your own words.

3.Answer any questions from the group.

4.Read out your discussion questions to the group and lead a discussion.

5.You will be evaluated on your presentation skills and your ability to lead a group discussion.

Notetaking:

1. While you are listening to a group member's presentation, please take point-form notes. After the presentations, write a short 2-3-sentence summary.

2. Please hand in your notes and summaries after all the presentations have been completed.

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II. ORAL JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

Rationale and Overview:

This activity helps EAP students to develop their speaking and pronunciation skills, and encourages students to actively use new vocabulary, and grammatical structures. In addition, this activity aims to develop students' self-awareness of vocabulary and grammar errors, and tries to correct their own errors.

Procedure:

On a regular basis, ((i.e. , weekly or bi-weekly), each student brings an audiocassette to class to record their speech production on a particular topic. Alternatively, if your school has a CAN-8, Sony, Tanberg or other computer lab system, the teacher can set up the journals on it. The topic should be familiar to the students. In a content- or theme-based program, this activity works well at the end of a unit to review topics covered in class, and to synthesize vocabulary and grammatical structures learned in the unit.

1. Prepare several open-ended questions on a particular topic.

2. Warm-up: Allow the students to discuss these questions in small groups (3 is optimal). Rotate the group members after each question so that the students have the opportunity to talk to different classmates.

3. After the warm-up, each student meets with the teacher individually, randomly selects one of the questions, and then tape-records (or records in lab) his/her opinion about the topic, prompted by the teacher. Students should speak for at least 2 – 3 minutes.

4. The individual recordings can be done while the other students in the class are engaged in an independent task, e.g., during lab class.
5. Students take their tapes home, transcribe their recording, and then rewrite the text with corrections.
6. Students hand in their tapes and transcripts. If you are using a lab, listen to the students' recordings and provide feedback.

Evaluation:

1. The teacher listens to the tapes (or recordings) and evaluates the students on content, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. It is important to give some oral feedback to the students on tape.
2. The teacher evaluates the accuracy of the transcript and corrections.
3. The teacher makes additional corrections to the text.
4. When the tapes and transcripts are returned to the students, the students record the corrected text after the previous recording. The students should also incorporate any suggestions that the teacher has made regarding their pronunciation.

Tips:

- Have the students save all their journals, that is, not record over a previous journal so that they can hear the progress that they make during their course.
- Have the students cue the tapes in preparation for an oral journal.
- If your school has computer lab facilities, check out the possibilities to make recordings on the computer.

ORAL JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

This assignment is a speaking and writing activity based on the special topics that we will learn in class.

Procedure:

1. Every student must bring a audiocassette tape to class. Your teacher will ask you to talk about a topic. This will be recorded on your cassette tape.

2. Your teacher will evaluate your speaking skills on a scale from 1 to 5:

1 – 2 = needs improvement 3 = satisfactory 4 – 5 = good/excellent

You will be evaluated on:

- **Content** = How well is the information related to the topic? How interesting and thoughtful is the information?
- **Vocabulary** = How well can you use the new words that you have learned?
- **Grammar** = How well can you use the new grammar structures that you have learned?
- **Pronunciation** = How clear are your vowel and consonant sounds? How well can you produce proper word stress and intonation?

3. For homework, listen to your recording and transcribe what you said. This means that you have to **write down every word** that you said in the recording, including words that are repeated. Don't change anything; write down exactly the words you hear.

4. After you have transcribed your recording, you have to correct any vocabulary and grammar errors that you have made; write in complete sentences. Rewrite the whole text with the corrections in a separate paragraph, but do not add any new information.

5. Hand in the tape and the written texts on the due date. Please type and double space your work.

6.Your writing will be evaluated on a scale from 1 to 5:

1 – 2 = needs improvement 3 = satisfactory 4 – 5 = good/excellent

You will be evaluated on:

- **Transcription Accuracy** = How accurately have you transcribed your recording?
- **Vocabulary Correction** = How accurately have you corrected any word form and word choice errors?
- **Grammar Correction** = How accurately have you corrected any grammar errors? e.g. verb tense/ form, subject-verb agreement.

- **Writing Correction** = How accurately have you corrected any writing errors? e.g., sentence structure, capitalization, punctuation.

7. When you get back your tape and your assignment, listen to your teacher's comments at the end of your recording. Re-record your answer with all the corrections and suggestions from your teacher.

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Oral Journals in the Language Lab

This assignment is a speaking and writing activity based on the special topics we will learn in class.

Procedure:

1. This assignment will be completed in your lab class. Each week, you will be asked to talk about a different topic. You will be given a few minutes to practise talking about the topic with a partner. Then, you will log on to the Oral Journal in the lab and record your answer.

2. Log on to the language lab; Level 5; your teacher's name; Oral Journal (#).

3. Talk about the topic for 2 to 3 minutes.

4. When you have finished recording, listen to your recording and transcribe what you said. This means that you have to **write down every word** that you said in the recording. Don't change anything; write down exactly the words you hear. (Open another window and use Word to do your transcription.)

5. After you have transcribed your recording, correct any vocabulary and grammar errors that you made, and write in complete sentences. Rewrite the whole text with the corrections in a separate paragraph, but do not add any new information.

6. Hand in your transcription when you have finished (at the end of the lab class).

7. In the following week, when you get back your assignment, re-record your answer with all the corrections. (Go to Correction in the Oral Journal in CAN.)

8. You may then start the next oral journal.

Evaluation

Your **speaking** will be evaluated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = needs improvement and 5 = excellent. You will be evaluated on:

- **Content** = How well is the information related to the topic? How interesting and thoughtful is the information?

- **Vocabulary** = How well can you use any new words that you have learnt?

- **Grammar** = How well can you use any new grammar points that you have learnt?
- **Pronunciation** = How clear are your vowel and consonant sounds? How well can you produce proper word stress and intonation?

Your **writing** will be evaluated on a scale of 1 from 5, where 1 = needs improvement and 5 = excellent, on:

- **Transcription Accuracy** = How accurately have you transcribed your recording? Have you written every word that you said?
- **Vocabulary Correction** = How accurately have you corrected any word form and word choice errors?
- **Grammar Correction** = How accurately have you corrected any grammar errors? e.g., verb tense/form, subject-verb agreement.
- **Writing Correction** = How accurately have you corrected any writing errors? e.g., capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure.
- You will complete 4 oral journals. The first one will be for practice. The other three will be graded and each will be worth 5% of your final mark.

Using Authentic Materials, Journal-Writing in a Multi-level Setting, Self-access Activities

Irene J.I. Lardizabal

Look Mom! No Textbooks was a hands-on workshop about day-to-day materials students potentially use at home, at work or at school. I gave a brief lecture on the importance of stepping out of the textbook world and using authentic materials ESL learners need in the real world. After that, the participants formed small groups and were given multilevel tasks using flyers, brochures, phone books, maps, bills, etc. After about 20 minutes, the group leaders gave their "reports" on the usefulness of the activity in real life situations. Aside from the replicated handouts of the small group tasks, I also provided the teachers with supplementary lesson plans and suggestions to go beyond what they had learned. The teachers couldn't wait to apply what they have experienced in the workshop.

Journal Writing in a Multilevel Setting was a hands-on workshop about encouraging students in journaling. I presented the different definitions of journal writing, its stages, and techniques. After reviewing all these, I asked the participants to actually choose a pre-writing method and write a first draft. The teachers were given strips of paper with different topics written on them. After a pensive silence, I asked the teachers to do peer correction, as I would in my own multilevel class. Then, I called on a number of teachers to read aloud what they had written. Finally, I discussed the remainder of the handouts, which showed my own students' writing samples and many more journal writing ideas for a multilevel class. Participants expressed that because of the workshop, they were motivated to explore journal writing in their classroom workshop.

Quiet Please! was a hands-on workshop about self-access materials which can be used in a multilevel setting. The term "quiet" does not only refer to the need for quiet time for students, but also for teachers. The workshop focused on meaningful, communicative activities which students can tackle independently while teachers take a break, do administrative work or mark papers. After An overview of self-access materials, I asked participants to form small groups to perform such independent tasks as board games, crosswords, puzzles, reading and writing activities. Participants shared their feedback to the whole group after 15-20 and were given a set of handouts.

Irene J.I. Lardizabal, *formerly with the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, is now with ESLplus Inc.*

Learning the Listening Ropes: Teaching non-verbal communication skills

Vesna Nikolic and Eileen Paulsen

If non-verbal messages are so important, how can teachers teach this kind of communication? First, students should be made aware of what they are doing wrong. Awareness is the key: students can correct only those behaviours they are aware of. The problem, experts say, is that most cultural mores are hidden outside voluntary control. Our students do not go to the pharmacy with the intention of standing too close to the person they talk to, if that is typical of their culture. They do not make a conscious decision that they will not maintain eye contact with anyone they talk to. It's a culturally programmed behaviour they may not even be aware of.

Second, the teacher needs to develop an intercultural perspective by learning about other cultures and becoming better able to understand why problems occur. Teaching culture is a challenging task. As Craig Storti, the author of "The Art of Crossing Cultures explains," We cannot put ourselves in someone else's shoes. Or rather, we can, but it's still our own feet we will feel" (Storti, 1990). Another factor related to non-verbal language we need to be aware of is congruence. If our learners are congruent, their verbal and non-verbal communications send the same message.

Otherwise, their words do not match their body language, facial expressions, body posture or tone, and the overall message can be misunderstood. Even worse, their listener will trust their body language or tone more than they will the actual words uttered.

Why is listening a neglected skill?

As we have already stated, teaching non-verbal language is often ignored in our classrooms. So have listening skills. Teachers focus on teaching listening comprehension, but rarely teach interpersonal listening skills. Our students need to know what to do verbally and non-verbally when listening. Many of us know it, but what we know is not always what we practise. Unfortunately, teaching listening skills is absent in the professional development of administrators. Nor is it emphasized in teacher-training programs. Data quoted in Madeleine Burley-Allen's book, " Listening: The Forgotten Skill," show that of a total of 3,704 pages of 15 textbooks used in teacher-training, only 82 mentioned listening. Consequently, it is not systematically taught to elementary/high school and adult ESL students, who get:

12 years of formal training in writing

6-8	years of formal training in reading
1-2	years of formal training in speaking, and, ONLY
0-1/2	year of formal training in listening (Burley Allen, 1995)

It is little wonder that few people, including native English speakers, have truly effective listening skills. Does the same statement apply to teachers? Numerous studies on "wait time" – the time that elapses between the teacher's question and the student's response -- has proved that it does. Very few teachers resist the temptation to say something. They typically do not wait for students' responses for longer than one second. However, the skill is trainable. If teachers prolonged wait time to more than one second after asking a question, the length and quality of student responses increases from 300-700% (Barnette et al, 1995). If pausing improves classroom communication to such a dramatic degree, it must improve everyday communication too.

Why is listening a neglected skill?

There are many reasons. In our society, speaking is usually connected with power, whereas listening is considered a passive skill or interpreted as a lack of knowledge. Much of academia emphasizes talking, not listening. Students who quickly give their opinions are usually rewarded, whereas those who take time to listen and think often are not. What message does this send to our future teachers, CEOs, engineers, and doctors?

American sociolinguist, Deborah Tannen says criticism, attack and opposition are often predominant ways of responding to people or ideas. Our communication is framed as a battle or game in which winning or losing becomes our main concern. It's a "pervasive, warlike atmosphere that makes us approach public dialogue, and about anything we need to accomplish, as if it were a fight," Tannen explains. "It's the knee-jerk aggression for it's own sake." (Tannen, 1998). It's easy to agree with Tannen. Just think about how students communicate in schools and how people talk in interviews and debates in politics and sports. The funny thing is that even Tannen's book is written in the same, argumentative way, which only proves that we are all part of this culture. Being part of "the argument culture" makes it hard for us to focus on emphathetic listening – the most effective level of listening.

According to Madeleine Burley-Allen, there are three levels of listening:

- Level 1, or empathetic listening, is one of the 7 habits of highly effective people. In it, the listener refrains from judging the speaker and tries to see things from his/her perspective.

This is listening from the heart. The listener is truly interested in what the speaker is saying and seeks to understand first, then to be understood. People love this type of listener (why else would they pay hundreds of dollars to psychotherapists?).

- Level 2 implies hearing things, but not really listening. The listener stays at the surface of communication and neither fully understands the deeper meaning of what is said, nor attempts to do so.

- Level 3 is listening in spurts – being somewhat aware of others, but paying attention to oneself. It's tuning in and out, passive listening without responding (Burley-Allen, 1995).

Most of us use all three levels every day. We cannot engage in Level 1 listening all the time without reason because it requires tremendous energy. In addition, when we think, our brain works several hundred words per minute faster than when we listen or speak. This time differential creates spare brain capacity, and our mind engages in other activities. We start daydreaming or thinking about our personal matters.

Spare brain capacity is not the only problem. We listen through filters. Our brain processes each new piece of experience through filters that take various forms. Filters that exert the most influence on us are prejudices, past experiences, values, beliefs, physical environment and values (Burley-Allen, 1995). Let's focus on beliefs and past experience in order to show the effect of these filters. Consider the following situation: students from some cultures believe that learning can only happen in a quiet, teacher-dominated class where the desks are arranged in rows. If these students are placed in a class where the teacher uses audio, visual and kinesthetic approaches to learning and pair and group work at large tables, there could be a decided lack of communication.

When people are unaware of how much their beliefs influence their attitude toward others, they find it difficult to listen to others' opinion or accept their behaviour. Therefore, teachers must be aware not only of their own belief filters but also those of their students and work with them to develop an acceptable learning environment. The second filter that can influence us is past experiences. Many of us grew up hearing these words from our parents, "Don't interrupt," "Children should be seen and not heard," and "You're too young to understand." How many of us have said the same thing to our children? We tend to duplicate the relationship patterns we experienced in our early years. If we weren't listened to as children, or our parents talked 'at' instead of 'to' each other, we may also tend to be non-listeners.

Perceptual psychologists claim that we each invent our own universe: we perceive things through both our cultural and personal experience lenses. "If you walk around the world with a hammer in your hands, you are going to see a lot of nails around," psychologist, Judith DeLozier remembers her mother saying. We see things the way we want to see them. We can carry this one step further and say that sometimes we hear what we want to hear.

Take, for example, the story of the woman who was at a wedding, unescorted, and was sitting and listening to the band after dinner and wishing she were on the dance floor. Imagine her delight when a friend's husband came over and gestured toward the dance floor and asked her if she wanted to dance. Once they arrived on the dance floor, she could see that he was not that enthusiastic. It was halfway through the song before her partner admitted that he had asked her if she wanted a drink, not if she wanted to dance.

How do you become a good listener?

Before you can teach listening skills, you must first practise what you know and be a good listener yourself. To do this, follow the steps that Madeleine Burley Allan has suggested in her Listening System:

- Examine your own listening patterns
- Minimize or remove barriers and filters
- Realize that your listening patterns may be a product of your childhood
- Be interested in the other person
- Keep your anger and other emotions out of the interaction
- Clarify meaning and understanding
- Use a positive tone of voice (Burley-Allen, 1995)

Where do you find material to teach interpersonal listening skills?
How do you make your students aware of all this information?
What material is available for teaching non-verbal language?

For higher levels, the book, "Have Your Say," includes a chapter on body language. Even though it has been written with the EFL student population in mind, it can still be useful for our students. Jean-Paul Bedard, an instructor for the Toronto Catholic District School Board, has created activities Body Language and Personal Space that you may find useful. Available from the Board's website, www.tcdsb.org/adulted, they can also be adapted for lower levels. There are resources on the market — on the internet and in the media.

For example, TV sitcoms and political debates are a great resource for teaching body language. You don't even need to have the sound on. Have the learners guess what the people are saying merely by watching their body language and gestures. Better yet: videotape your learners. Have them watch the tape. If they can see themselves, they'll see the non-verbal habits they were not aware of. Viewing will also give them the opportunity to give themselves a pat on the back for everything they are doing well.

Finally, you can develop speaking and reading activities designed specifically for your students, with their particular needs in mind. Create a text on listening that could be done as a reading activity in class. Make it fun by creating an information gap activity based on the reading. Talk about the content of the text. Ask students what they could do to make their listening skills better.

Discuss the cultural aspects of listening. Discuss what people do when they do not listen. Tell your learners that nearly half our time communicating is spent listening, but that our listening efficiency is just 25%. And most people listen only at 25% of their capacity, and distort, misunderstand, or ignore the rest (White, 1998). What else do they do? You can brainstorm it with your students and create a survey on annoying listening habits. What are your students annoyed by most?

This may be a sophisticated awareness-raising device through which students may become aware that some of their habits may be annoying to others or inappropriate in the English speaking culture. Some of the habits are: staring off into space when listening, interrupting, tapping a pen or drumming fingers, crossing arms, yawning, not maintaining eye contact, etc. In addition to these non-verbal habits, certain vocabulary, including "worthless," "pushy," "untrue" or "rude," may turn people off.

Give your students a few sentences with these words and see if they can restate the sentence in a more diplomatic way. Teach them how to restate what was said or ask for clarification. Then pair them up and have them listen to their partners talk about a problem that is not too personal; ask them to do nothing but listen, restate or ask for clarification. Talk about giving advice. ESL books abound in ways of offering advice. Do we always want advice from people? Have the students discuss when and if it's appropriate to give advice. At the end of this discussion, tell them about the grade six student who, when asked to write a paragraph about Socrates, wrote, "Socrates was a Greek philosopher who went around and gave people good advice. They poisoned him." (Kushner, 1991).

In conclusion

Listening is a crucial skill for both teachers and students. By actively listening, we address the most basic human needs — to be understood, validated and appreciated. When these are addressed, listeners lower their defenses and open communication channels. Although we cannot listen empathetically all the time, we should not deny our students this valuable communication skill.

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Learning about Unit 731 for the very first time

Sylvan Payne, Miyazaki International College

About Miyazaki International College

Miyazaki International College (MIC) is located in Miyazaki, Japan. MIC offers a rigorous academic program carefully designed to enrich students' lives, prepare them to think critically, and equip them to contribute to the improvement of society. To assist students to achieve these objectives, MIC has developed a multi-disciplinary curriculum, assembled a distinguished international faculty, created a strong undergraduate library, and incorporated computers and other modern technologies into its program..

During the first two years, all courses other than English and Japanese Expression are taught by language-content teams. A language specialist and a content specialist jointly plan and teach courses which build English skills while they teach knowledge of a subject area and develop thinking skills. MIC classes emphasize discussion, cooperative learning, problem solving, and other activities stressing critical thinking and creativity.

The academic program of each student includes courses in the humanities, social sciences, and information technology or life sciences, including courses in each area which explore environmental issues. Students also study the English and Japanese languages, and take courses which examine aspects of Japanese culture from comparative perspectives. Students spend a semester abroad in an English-speaking university in an English-speaking country during their second year; and they complete a thesis under faculty supervision during the fourth year. (from the MIC Bulletin, 2003)

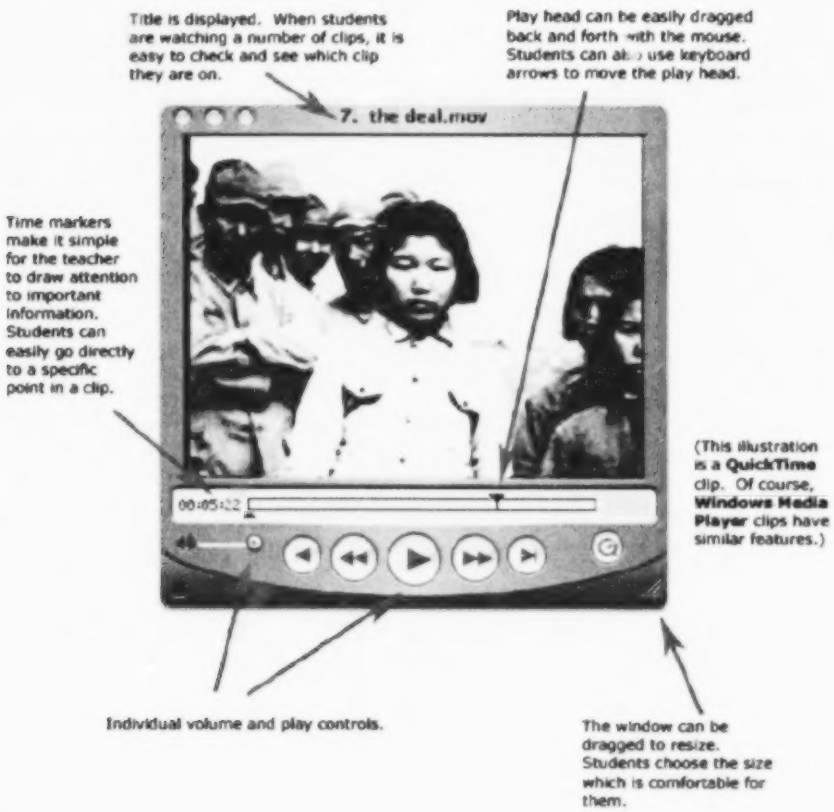
Unit 731

In the spring semester of 2002, my teaching partner and I included an extended unit on World War II during the first month of a second-year course, Japan-North America Relations. I was the language specialist. Two weeks, 12 classroom hours, were spent studying Unit 731, the Japanese Army's infamous biological and chemical weapons laboratory-factory in Manchuria. The scientists and doctors of Unit 731 developed innovative ways to deliver plague germs and poison gas to a battlefield. For test subjects, they used kidnapped Chinese citizens as well as Russian, Chinese and American prisoners of war. The unit's personnel euphemistically referred to the subjects as *maruta*, or logs, and told the local inhabitants that Unit 731 was a lumberyard.

Among other atrocities, the staff performed vivisections, injected anthrax, did shrapnel bomb-blast experiments using blindfolded subjects, and dropped clouds of bubonic plague fleas onto unsuspecting Chinese villages. After the war, these scientists traded their data to the American Occupation authorities for immunity from prosecution and returned to high-level careers in science, medicine, education and government back in Japan.

The pragmatic Americans subsequently used the research not only to improve their own biological and chemical weapons but also to design protective measures and equipment for military personnel (Gold, 1996). In the course of the unit, students watched *Unit 731: Nightmare in Manchuria* (Nelson, 1996), a 50-minute documentary video. It was edited to 30 minutes, converted to digital QuickTime clips and burned onto CDs. The students watched the clips using laptop computers in the classroom. We wrote an accompanying 10-page handout for the video that included activities in listening, vocabulary building, defining words, choosing synonyms, discussion, narration, summarizing, guessing meaning, and prediction.

Using digital clips in a class like this:


Title is displayed. When students are watching a number of clips, it is easy to check and see which clip they are on.
Play head can be easily dragged back and forth with the mouse. Students can also use keyboard arrows to move the play head.
7. the deal.mov
Time markers make it simple for the teacher to draw attention to important information. Students can easily go directly to a specific point in a clip.
00:05:22
(This illustration is a **QuickTime** clip. Of course, **Windows Media Player** clips have similar features.)
Individual volume and play controls.
The window can be dragged to resize. Students choose the size which is comfortable for them.

The QuickTime format gave the students individual and active control over the video clips; to complete the handout, each student probably watched the entire video as many as ten times, often playing key phrases over and over for better comprehension. Some students even borrowed the CDs and watched them outside of class.

Compared with tradtional use of video content in a classroom, particularly video which contains a lot of dense language terms, the student involvement was dramatically increased. Instead of watching a video once or twice (and missing most of it) student were forced to wrestle with the content and language of the videos and master it through repeated watching. It also allowed us as teachers to monitor student work more effectively than if they were all watching as a group. We were also able to do more types of activities, devoting more time to acquiring the knowledge from many directions.

This addressed individual student needs and preferences and no one felt either bored or left behind, which happens too often with repeated VCR viewing. During the two weeks, the students also had homework doing Internet research and reading. In addition, they wrote daily reflections in class journals, participated in discussions, gave small group presentations and each wrote a two-page essay as a final product.

According to their written and spoken remarks, most of them found learning about Unit 731 to be deeply traumatic, reflecting on the fact that only two generations ago Japanese soldiers and doctors had participated in such horrors. They expressed shock and indignation that the imperial government had officially sponsored the atrocities and that the war criminals had gone unpunished.

The language and content outcomes

In the course of the unit, the students got plenty of individual focused listening practice, much more than they would have watching a video as a group. They also developed a particular skill—comprehending documentary film narration. In addition to practice in all the other skills, (reading, writing and speaking) they acquired a lot of great vocabulary.

In terms of course content, the students got a sobering look at a little national infamy, which is a usually good thing in small doses. Unit 731, as with most Japanese war crimes, has been officially swept under the rug and most Japanese people do not learn about it in history class. These students were all preparing for a semester abroad and this knowledge better prepared them for the occasional ambivalent feelings some of their East Asian classmates might have for Japanese people.

In addition, the students developed a frame of reference for what was going to be a major focus of world events: weapons of mass destruction. This was more than we intended because we could not predict how timely it would be within a matter of weeks. The video we were watching was produced in 1996. In the last few seconds of the video, the narrator intones, "*Events in Iraq may prove that the legacy of Unit 731 lives on. There are reports that president Saddam Hussein has tested his biological and chemical weapons on his own Iraqi citizens and Iranian prisoners of war. Knowing this, history is in the process of repeating itself. The lessons of Unit 731 must be learned, and learned quickly.*" We taught this course in the early spring of 2002.

This was post-9/11, post-anthrax scare, post-Afghan War, post axis-of-evil state of the union speech. Whether Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction was about to become a global issue of hot debate which would dominate world news. Our students had seen a little of the horror behind the production and testing of WMDs and could attest to the need to get to the bottom of things.

A note on preparing the material

As with most content-based team-taught units, this took a fair bit of time to develop. Our research and pre-planning took up 5-6 hours. This included watching the movie together and discussing which parts we wanted to use. Editing the video and burning the CDs took almost 3 hours. Once the clips were made, we were able to create the handout which took 2-3 to produce.

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Why Çan We Not Understand Aurally What We Comprehend Visually?

Xiaomei Song

As a teacher of English as a Foreign Language [EFL] in university, many students complained to me that they knew words and sentences well if these words were written in black and white. Unfortunately, they could not comprehend the main idea of listening passages in exams of listening comprehension, not to mention the comprehension of contextual details of the passages.

As a learner of English as a Second Language [ESL] in a native speaking country, I feel the similar pressure when I listen to lectures, radios or watch TV even though I can do assigned readings or read newspapers without much difficulties. Therefore this article attempts to address concerns about the disparity between listening and reading comprehension among Chinese EFL learners.

First I differentiate between the terms of second language acquisition and second language learning. I then review the development of psychological foundations in second language learning and highlight the interactional context and situated cognition. Afterwards I analyse relationships between reading and listening, focusing on the dimensions of difficulties in listening comprehension. A summary is included in the end.

Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning

How adolescents or adults learn a foreign language has fascinated researchers in the field of language learning for many decades. Before trying to understand how learners develop fluency in a foreign language, it is necessary to differentiate between the terms second language acquisition and second language learning. The distinction is essential because naturally acquiring a language is quite different from formally learning a language in a classroom (John &Torrez, 2001). Language acquisition is an unconscious learning process.

Learners listen to conversation and watch people's behaviours in the rich linguistic and

cultural environment that they grow up in. Much of their learning is commonly located in daily life, such as classroom activities, community involvement, social works and other sites of informal education. John and Torrez (2001) claimed that the purpose of language acquisition was to communicate instead of imitating familiar sounds in their environment. In contrast, language learning requires formal knowledge of explicit rule, forms, and structures. Learners are taught formally in classrooms and they learn a second language by repetition and imitation (John & Torrez, 2001). Thus language learning specifically refers to these individuals who learn a second language after achieving first language competence or in an environment where it is not possible to pick up a sustained and authentic linguistic and cultural environment.

Generally speaking, learners of second language learning composed to different language processing models with traces of their prior sociocultural knowledge. Their language learning is influenced by their first language processing experience and their "lectured" second language knowledge. Therefore, the amount of their language learning difficulties is inevitably larger than that of learners of second language acquisition. However, since "most recognized authorities use the words language acquisition and language learning interchangeably and without noticing the distinction described above," these two terms were synonymously used even after John and Torrez (2001, p. 10) explained the distinction. The two terms are clearly distinguished in this article and the concentration in this paper is second language learning, which means learners get formal language education in classrooms.

Second Language Learning and Interaction

In the field of second language learning, interaction has long been considered important. Initially, much of the research was based on a psycholinguistic perspective of language learning. In the early to mid-1980s, the research on interaction has been focused mainly on the learner's input. Long's (1983) study of modification in native speaker input to non-native speakers claimed that the interaction modifications were facilitative and necessary for learning foreign languages. Although the

modifications sometimes resulted in ungrammatical speech, more often they provided well-formed and appropriate input for the listener. He concluded that non-native speakers could not learn from unmodified native speech. However, his arguments are not comprehensive to cover the whole processes of second language learning. Later investigatory concerns included the importance of learners' output in interaction.

Gass (1988) assumed five levels in a learner's conversion of input to output: apperceived input, comprehended input, intake, integration, and output. According to Gass, some obvious language data became perceived input; a part of this perceived input was comprehended; some of the comprehended input was processed through intake and might be integrated into the learner's system, or simply stored; and learners' output might or might not indicate that integration had taken place.

The author integrated psycholinguistic and linguistic aspects of research on second language learning. When a learner attempts production, linguistic knowledge is currently available in the interlanguage. Then, the learner tests out hypotheses currently about the organization of the language system. Finally, through the learner's output and an interlocutor's response to that output, the learner can reflect on the language use. Within this model, negotiation sequences allow some input to become available for processing, but do not guarantee that this will take place.

A sociocultural perspective of language and learning is based on theoretical development and investigations that have taken place over the past few years. Takahashi, Austin and Morimoto (1995) paraphrased what Vygotsky, an established Russian pshcholinguist, commented. The authors explained that " a child was born into a certain society and learned about his or her own world, including cultural knowledge and social conversions, through participation in experiences constituted within that world" (p.141). Such a perspective suggests that second language learning should not be restricted to the linguistic content of a text, such as pronunciation, vocabulary and

grammar. In examining foreign language learning from a sociocultural perspective, it is found that learners in classrooms are infused with input on phonological, morphological, semantic, lexical, and syntactic knowledge from teachers and textbooks. However the linguistic knowledge is far away from the appreciate communication in authentic settings.

Students need to be aware of the social and interactional norms for second and foreign languages they learn. The norms are a social and cultural network that links language, cultural practices and knowledge building, which was demonstrated in a research on foreign language learning in elementary school programs (Takahashi, Austin & Morimot, 1995). In the research, the sociocultural theory advanced by Vygotsky was employed to examine the nature of social interaction and language development. The lessons in classrooms included learning about social content, metalearning and learning about learning. The study indicates the importance of socioculturally proper communication in and out of classrooms.

Such research suggests that the interactional relationships between the individual and others, society, and culture all contribute to language learning. The perspective explains why normally it is easier for learners to comprehend conversation when native speakers talk with them while it is comparatively hard to comprehend native speakers talking with each other. The main reason is that the interactional relationship between native speakers is unpredictable and topics involved are uncertain and changeable for learners.

It is understandable that rich linguistic and cultural circumstances are unavailable for a majority of EFL learners in China. However, some Chinese ESL learners tend to be lack of interaction with native speakers and English-speaking society as well. One learner who stayed in a native speaking country for more than ten years complained that he felt deaf and alienated whenever he went to a pub. Lack of interaction with the society and culture leads to isolation and alienation in native speaking countries. From this perspective language requires active human

agents making full use of available resources for interaction because language cannot be viewed as having fixed meanings independent of its context interaction.

Second Language Learning and Situated Cognition

Learners are not passive recipients of information, especially EFL learners who have been enriched with their home social and cultural norms and lack of interaction with the target society. Greeno (1991) advocated that learning is the ability to find and use recourses within the conceptual environment. Thus, knowledge is acquired through the internal process of the agent when individual interacts with the environment. Reasoning and analysing occurs as the agent interacts with the situation in the mental models. nlike sociocultural theory above mentioned, which highlights the role of social and culture context in shaping cognition and information processing, situated cognition accounts for the contribution of the mind in knowledge acquisition (Reynolds, Sinatra, & Jetton, 1996). Like many other theories, there are different interpretations for situated cognition. In this paper, it aims at language learning within a broad perspective that combines language, thoughts and sociocultural interaction.

Lave and Wenger (1991) extended Vygotsky's ideas of mentoring and expert/novice relationships by examining how individuals learn through participation in a community of practice. In their view, learning was not simply situated in practice, but an intergral part of generative social practice in the real world. Legitimate peripheral participation was regarded as a descriptor of social interaction that involved learning as an integral constituent. Learning was mediated by the differences of perspective and was distributed among the coparticipants. Therefore the notion of situated learning is a bridge between cognitive processes (and thus learning) and social practice.

Lave and Wenger (1991) concluded their book with exploration of meanings of four words "person", "activity", "knowing" and the "social world". A person, as both a member of the social world and agent of activity, is changing knowledge, skill and discourse which are part of a developing identity individually through participation with a community.

Coming from this angle, learning takes place through participation and interaction. In the fields of situated interaction, second language learning entails participation with influence of individual learning which originate from both their learning process in first language acquisition and formal second language instructions in classrooms as well as their sociocultural experience and knowledge. To begin with, different cultures bring different systems of background knowledge to the comprehension process.

A cross-culture study demonstrated that "reading comprehension was a function of cultural background knowledge "(Steffensen & Joag-Dev, 1984, p. 60). When interacting with writers, if readers possessed the schemata assumed by the writer, they understood what was stated and they could make the interferences effortlessly; if they did not, they attempted to accommodate and make modification to their pre-existing knowledge structures. Knowing and language learning is hence located in the interaction and may involve gradual transformation of identities.

In some cases, students from non-native English speaking countries have not developed a habit to say sorry after sneezing, which is considered proper and established language behaviour. After being provided frequent settings in native speaking countries, some may change their mental models while some persist in their original mechanisms. Alternatively, when learners' minds interact with information and knowledge as an active agent, they may direct, analyze, enhance, or resist these inputs in the second language learning within a particular context and culture.

Beverly and Moore (1998) stated that different ages had more or less egocentric perceptions of experience and thus differentially weighted their dependence on acquired ability and experience in relation to timeframes, behaviour, goals, and other critical factors. The cognitive and situated models are interweaved related with the learner's conceptual age and the context of learning. The older the learners are, the harder it is for them to change their mental models.

Secondly, cross-language transfer has been a major concern among language researchers

for the past two decades. Literature indicates that features of the first language processing experience help establish language mechanism, which may help or hinder the processing of second language learning. Priority of phonological awareness is universally accepted no matter in first language learning or in second language learning. (Adams, 1990; Durgunog^lu, Nagy, & Hancin-Bhatt, 1993). Adams (1990) argued that only those prereaders who acquire awareness of phonemes learned to read successfully and the prerequisites of phonological awareness were to become aware of spoken words, syllables, and phonemes.

In the research with monolingual beginning readers, Durgunog^lu, Nagy, & Hancin-Bhatt (1993) concluded that phonological awareness was a significant predictor of performance on word recognition both within and across languages. However there are other factors that contribute to the mental framework which is derived from first language acquisition.

As far as the factor of morphographic aspect is concerned, there exists big difference between English and Chinese. English language belongs to Roman alphabetic system, in which there is a connection between sounds and symbols. Letters of the alphabet are used to represent words. Chinese language falls into nonalphabetical system, in which there is no connection between sounds and symbols, but symbols are used to represent ideas.

After having examined the phonological processing abilities of native English readers and of three other language groups of learners of English (Arabic, Spanish and Japanese), Koda (1990) found that the nonnative phonographic groups and the native control group were handicapped by the absence of phonological cues to a much greater extent than students in the nonnative morphographic group.

Koda (1990) attributed this to the different strategies employed by the two groups of readers. Students in the phonographic language background groups depended heavily on the phonological clues available in visual representations, whereas students in the morphographic

language background group used different strategies for processing phonologically inaccessible symbols. Consequently, Chinese learners' first language processing experience may put their development of phonetic awareness into a disadvantage position in second language learning.

Last, learning strategies and teaching methodologies in foreign language classroom affect learners' processing in language learning. Sampling on 109 first-year university students, the research done by Gardner, Masgoret, & Tremblay (1999) directed attention to the role of early sociocultural environment and learning strategies on perceptions of second language competence. They assessed the linguistic nature of home community, recollections of early experiences in second language learning, and attitudes and beliefs about language learning, which provides support that prior learning experiences strongly influent learners' second language proficiency. O'Malley and Chamot (1990), outlined a scheme which includes cognitive, metacognitive, and social/ affective strategies in second language acquisition.

Cognitive strategies work with incoming information in ways that enhance learning; metacognitive strategies are described as "higher order executive skills" that may involve the planning, monitoring, or evaluation of an activity, and social/affective strategies entail "interaction with another person or ideational control over affect" (pp. 44-45). Teaching methodologies also influence language learning. In Wang's (2001) article, a case study was done on the cross-cultural learning experiences of two Chinese students in American universities. The researcher observed that like most other Chinese learners, the two subjects were taught English formally in classrooms emphasizing on the written form more than the spoken form. As a result, students knew the grammar and vocabulary of English, but they were still "deaf and mute" in English. Thus, teaching methodologies affect students' learning strategies, which may facilitate or hamper the process of second language learning.

In sum, "language is not about conveying neutral or objective information; rather it is about communicating perspectives on experience and action in the world, often in contrast to alternative

and competing perspective" (Gee, 2001, p. 715). Language does not appear in isolation. It takes place in a socioculture situation. In situative theory, the learner does not exist without language context; in cognitive theory individuals are comprised of different mental forms awaiting updated by environments.

Second language learning is not an individual passion but emerges from participation with socioculture activities and their mental models, which affect the interpretation of incoming perceptual messages. Therefore language learning is an interactive relationship that integrates learning with language, cognition, society, culture and socio-cultural interactions.

Similarities between Reading and Listening

Communication involves the transmission of information from one individual world to another, from one schematic setting to another (Widdowson, 1984). Underlying Widdowson's remarks is the linguistic view that information can be transmitted either via print (reading or writing) or via sound (listening or speaking). In general, reading and listening are both considered receptive skills by which our minds operate on, assimilate, sort and store incoming language input (Blair, 1991).

Therefore both are language comprehension, which is viewed as consisting of active and complex processes in which individuals construct meaning from aural or written information (Anderson, 1985). Anderson proposed that the mental processes for comprehending texts via print or sound were similar. He put forward three interrelated processes: perceptual processing, parsing, and utilization.

In *perceptual processing*, attention mainly focuses on texts and texts are retained in short-term memory. Incoming new information replaces old information in short-term memory continuously. While the text is still in short-term memory, some initial analyses of the language code may start and the encoding information may convert to some representations. *Parsing* refers to analyzing words and sentences in terms of grammatical constituents, identifying the parts of speech, inflectional forms, syntactic function, etc. Differentiation of language input into words and phrases is

important for detecting meaning in both aural and written language. The process is a combination among phonological, syntactic and semantic information.

The third process, *utilization*, refers to relating a mental representation of the text meaning to existing knowledge in long-term memory. Learners make use of their world knowledge and linguistic knowledge to identify the meanings of the text. The process is accessed in long-term memory that has a meaningful connection with the new information that has been parsed. Anderson (1985) considered *utilization* as a key to language comprehension since any message may be an interplay between information we already know and information that is totally new. Learners make predications and match existing knowledge to the incoming data in order to facilitate the further processing of new information.

Generally speaking, in reading and listening a series of words is first recognized, which involves phoneme, morpheme, and word recognition. Then readers and listeners use background and prior knowledge to make sense and anticipate the incoming information (Richards, 1994). These processes imply a close relationship between reading and listening. Although it is claimed that first language optimal listening comprehension is comparable to reading comprehension if the material is relatively easy (Hausfeld, 1981), there might exist differences between listening and reading for Chinese second language learners. It may be not holistic to assume that listening and reading represent the same set of activities and skills apart from the phonemic and orthographic levels.

Disparities between reading and listening

Although both listening and reading involve comprehension of information and share some similarities, they differ in some points. One obvious difference between reading and listening is that while in reading learners can go over the text leisurely, they generally do not have the opportunities to do the same in listening. Learners have no chances to listen exactly the same twice. Neither do they have much time to figure out what is going on in interactional or transactional conversation.

First, reading undeniably involves three necessary elements: reader, text and interaction

(Alderson & Urquhart, 1984).

Readers with different background and prior knowledge comprehend textbooks, local newspapers, pamphlets, brochures, booklets and so on. When one listens different types of listening discourse in different settings, the basic idea is that efficient listening is not word-by-word identification (Morley, 1991). This asks learners to predict what is going on based on both the linguistics context and the situation-and-topic and setting-and-participant context (Morley, 1991).

From this perspective the difference can be noticed between reading and listening. In listening comprehension, since listeners and speakers as well as topics for different purposes are all involved as changeable variables, it is more difficult to comprehend and predict listening comprehension completely in a limited time. In other words, the interaction in listening between learners and other interlocutors requires active agents more for comprehension, comprehensibility, and participation.

Actually, interactional conversations in listening examine the understanding of the society and culture tenets in a much closer way since its purpose is to maintain the social relationship (Richards, 1994). Nevertheless, some learners may be short of chances to pick up sustained language input and they do not establish an adequate social and cultural framework for the target language.

One study in Japan by Hirai (1999) drew a conclusion from data analysis that low-level students in reading and listening were both low, but the listening rate was slightly slower than the reading rate. A majority of the less proficient learners in the study encountered considerable difficulty in listening comprehension. The researcher argued one main reason was that those students failed to expose themselves to English frequently and lacked of familiarity with spoken English. A large number of Chinese EFL learners are confronted with the similar problems. Furthermore, China is a country that is far away from English speaking countries in distance, culture, beliefs, political system, and language. Different sociocultural experience adds difficulties in communication. Sun and Chen (1997) observed that most of their ESL interviewees indicated difference in cultural values, attitudes

and beliefs. "Communication is often put to an end due to cultural difference" (p. 10).

Lack of interaction and cultural shock impede Chinese ESL learners to improve their communicative abilities in listening. As a consequence, their performances and processes of negotiation of meanings cannot be adapted to different circumstances promptly. The discrepancy becomes more stressful in listening exams because learners have limited time to make sense of passages in unauthentic circumstances.

Second, the constructive process coming from the first language acquisition does not apply equally for Chinese learners between listening and reading. Research indicated that learners from a nonalphabetic orthography in their first language (e.g., China and Japan) had a greater sensitivity to visual information conveyed by orthographic patterns and they were less sensible to phonological information (Wade-Woolley, 1999). In the research, the Russian learners were more adept at manipulating phonological segments, whereas the nonalphebetic Japanese learners were more accurate at recognizing spelling patterns in English, which showed learners developed different strategies in word reading.

Because of first language mechanism requiring visually accessible, Chinese learners attach more importance to orthographic aspects. As a result, this may lead to uneven development in reading and listening ability in English for nonalphebetic Chinese learners.

Last but not unimportant, in exam-driven and mark-oriented classrooms teachers and students pay little attention to the development of communicative skills in China. The College English Syllabus (College English Curriculum Revision Team, 1986, 1999) puts reading into the first place and ignores the communicative function of language. Actually, the National Entrance Examination for Colleges and Universities did not include listening comprehension till last year. Under this circumstance, most language practitioners in China employ the traditional Grammar-translation strategy in teaching, which focuses on accuracy of grammatical parsing. The outcome is usually an inability on the part of students aural communication. Therefore, those who put more

emphasis on grammar teaching would be likely to produce students with strong reading ability but weak listening skills.

Accordingly, students develop strategies of priority of morthographic awareness and ignore phonological awareness. They form a deep-rooted mechanism by which words can't be known unless these words are written down. Yang (1999) described two Chinese students' first-semester experiences at Harvard University through in-depth interviews and observations. Both her two subjects, Li and Wang, felt they had little difficulty in reading and their real problems lay in listening, speaking, and writing. Especially for Wang, his inadequate listening and speaking skills made him diffident in communicating with other people. The author explored the factors from both perspectives of teaching and learning. Yang (1999) claimed not only longtime emphasis on reading instruction but also improper learning strategies significantly influenced their second language development.

Summary

In conclusion, the discrepancy of reading and listening abilities among Chinese learners is due to three factors. First, the interaction with the society and culture of native speaking community is inadequate, whereas the interaction in listening requires learners more for timely comprehension, comprehensibility, and participation. Second, as non-alphabetic first language learners, their insensitivity of phonology puts them into a disadvantage position. Last, learning strategies and teaching methodologies bring learners more unfavourable feature in developing listening abilities. Comprehensively, these factors lead to produce students with weak listening skills compared with their reading ability.